

UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF LOCAL DECISION-MAKING.

Over the past 20 years, we have seen a growing trend of one-size-fits-all bills filed on behalf of corporate special interests. These legislative policies suggest that each community has the same needs and circumstances, whether you live in a big metropolitan area or a small town. Florida is large – and each community is remarkably different. Think about St. Augustine versus Miami. Or Key West compared to Pensacola. That's why local decision-making is so important.

USE LOCAL EXAMPLES.

How is your community unique? What local issues has your city successfully addressed, and what solutions are they currently working on? Being able to answer these questions will help you better understand local decision-making and be able to talk about it effectively.

UNDERSTAND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS.

The state legislative process can be very complicated. With a very compressed window of time and lots of rules, it is easy to get lost in the process. But understanding how and when your issue will be discussed allows you to have the biggest impact possible as you talk with state lawmakers.

GET CLARIFICATION.

Make sure you are clear about whether your issue is a state or federal issue. If you don't understand how the proposed bill would impact your municipality, talk with your city leaders to get a better understanding before talking with your legislative delegation.

BE CONCISE.

Clear, concise, and personal messages to state lawmakers are the most effective. Think about the issues important to you, write down how you feel and then work on fine-tuning your message.

DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS.

The most impactful messages come from familiar faces. The more lawmakers see your face and hear your message, the easier it will be to get a response from them when it really matters.

BE FRIENDLY TO STAFF; THEY ARE THE GATEKEEPERS.

Legislative aides, district secretaries and interns can have tremendous sway in ensuring your meeting requests, phone calls and emails get shared. Treat them with respect and kindness. Legislators are busy – especially during session. Meetings with their staff can be just as effective.

MAKE IT CLEAR WHAT YOU'RE ASKING LAWMAKERS TO DO.

Whenever you communicate with a lawmaker, always include what action you want to see. Are you looking for a vote in favor or against a particular bill, or do you want a question to be raised at a legislative committee meeting debate? Be clear in your desired outcome. Ask your state lawmaker to commit to determining the local impact of proposed legislation before considering a vote.

HOLD YOUR STATE LAWMAKERS ACCOUNTABLE.

Check back with your House and/or Senate members and ask them how they voted and what actions they took on the issue. Be prepared to hold them accountable during and after legislative session. This can be done positively, respectfully and politely by assuring the legislator that because of this issue's importance, you want to know what actions occurred, if any, and want to fully understand what happened.

SAY THANK YOU.

Even if you disagree on an issue, lawmakers are more likely to listen if you have found a way to praise them. Don't be afraid to take your praise to social media. A picture with an appreciative caption on Facebook or Twitter can go a long way. Be sure to tag them!

GET OTHERS INVOLVED.

Successful advocacy for any issue needs as many voices as possible. It's likely your circle of friends or network share in your passion for your particular issue. Talk with them about it, and get them involved. The more people you have supporting you, the better!