KEYS TO EFFECTIVE CITIZEN ADVOCACY

1. **GOVERNMENT BELONGS TO THOSE WHO SHOW UP!**
   a. Physical presence at the Capitol, City Council meetings, etc. is ideal.
   b. Elected officials are more likely to remember you and what you say if it happens right before their eyes!
   c. Accountability of elected officials is easier when you can see them in action and they know you’re there (trust me, they recognize repeat visitors).
   d. Commitment to your cause shows through, and always stay until the end if possible.

2. **BE PREPARED AND GET TO THE POINT!**
   a. Have your comments and/or testimony prepared ahead of time.
      i. Memorize a brief opening and closing.
   b. 3-5 minutes of comments/testimony is ideal.
      i. Many committee chairs limit testimony to 3 minutes, especially if legislation draws a lot of attention, which ours often do.
   c. Have multiple copies (10-15) of your written testimony available, if possible.
      i. Others can deliver it for you if you have an emergency.
      ii. Some committees require at least 15 copies.
      iii. Often legislators are absent, they can look at written testimony later (very common).

3. **ARRIVE EARLY, STAY LATE**
   a. Always arrive early, it can take up to 15 minutes just to fill out witness testimony cards, and last minute changes to schedule are very common.
   b. If your bill or others draw a crowd, you could have to wait all night for your turn to testify.
      i. If you get there early, you can get to the “front of the line.”
      ii. Let Texas Values or the chairman know if you and others are arriving from out of town, they may be able to accommodate you and have you testify early.
   c. Floor debates can delay committee hearing start times (“2 p.m. or upon Adjournment”).
   d. Staying until the end of committee hearing can be very fruitful.
      i. Committee may vote on bill just after testimony (very exciting to see your bill pass in front of your own eyes!)
      ii. Observe, take notes of others’ testimony, legislator’s questions and responses.
         1. Remember, bill must go through Senate and House.
         2. Help prepare you/others for debate on Floor or in the media.
4. **USE THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE'S WEBSITE-IT’S FREE!**
   a. Will send you email update and alerts on movement of your bills.
   b. Updated regularly, and some vote information is released in real time.
   c. Watch and listen to testimony while waiting your turn, or for review.
      i. All committee hearings and floor debates are recorded and online live and for review.

5. **CIVIC LESSONS 101- POLITICIANS LOVE CHILDREN & BABIES**
   a. Bring you kids; they’ll have a lasting experience they won’t forget.
   b. Spend the day, before or after your testimony, visiting offices, asking them to co-author and/or pledge their support for your bill, target the fence-sitters.
      i. Children and babies are always great at getting attention.
      ii. Great way to start dialogue, and then focus on your issues.
   c. Every child I’ve seen testify receives the attention of all in the room.

6. **DO CURRENT RESEARCH, KNOW THE SCORE, BRING A FRIEND**
   a. Having timely, up to date research on your issue is vital; you will very likely be asked questions. If it is good, they will use it for floor debates and it will become a part of legislative history so make sure you’re right.
   b. Know who on the committee already supports your bill, watch for “softballs.”
   c. Know who is hostile to your bill, turn the tables on them, and ask them what they would agree to.
   d. Bring others with you, especially those with a personal stake in the outcome of the bill.
      i. Legislators notice the “score”, how many testified for or against a bill.
      ii. Split up different arguments of bill with others, shows the depth of positives, negatives of the bill.
      iii. Having others helps brainstorm, inspire winning thoughts while in hearing.

7. **RESPECT THE STAFF & FOLLOW UP**
   a. Staffers are the eyes/ears for the Legislators; they provide guidance on all issues.
      i. Spend time with them; act as if you are meeting with the legislator.
      ii. Give them a short one pager of talking points.
      iii. Let them know if you’re for/against a bill and that you are mobilizing others.
   b. Set up meeting with legislator beforehand; let them know you’re a constituent if so.
   c. Push to meet with legislator, but always be willing to meet with staffer.
   d. Follow up after your meeting to get an answer, for or against.

8. **“MAY I WALK WITH YOU?/SURE, I’LL WAIT”**
   a. Be willing to sit in an office to wait for a legislator to return.
      i. Common return time-just before morning session, after lunch, just before committee.
      ii. These are also great places to walk with them between meetings. (Keep it brief!)

*Texas Values is a group dedicated to preserving and advancing a culture of family values in the state of Texas. For more information, please visit txvalues.org or email us at info@txvalues.org.*