Meeting with Legislators about the state budget crisis

BEFORE THE MEETING
1. Decide who will attend and what their roles will be: Scheduler, personal story, data, answering tough questions, making the “ask”, note taker, follow-up.
2. Schedule the meeting – Be flexible and persistent. Ask how much time you will have.
3. Have a pre-meeting with those attending the meeting to review roles and practice what each person will say.

DURING THE MEETING
1. Introduce yourself - Say your name and what organization you represent.
2. Tell them the reason you are speaking with them (the state budget crisis including funding for your program).
3. Tell them the impact in their district on you personally or your organization. Speak to the impact on their district with your personal story and/or data on the issue if available.
4. Make an ask – Will you speak to leadership, across the aisle, to the press/in public supporting adequate revenue to prevent all cuts to services ahead of non-budget issues? When will you give us a report back on what you are personally doing?

AFTER THE MEETING
1. Send a thank you email or note to the legislator.
2. Provide any materials or answer questions that you said you would.
3. Report on how the meeting went to organization partners who can use the information to make their next meeting with the legislator more effective.
4. Follow-up with them in 1 or 2 weeks on what they said they would do.

TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY MEETING

- **Know what you want your 2-3 main points to be.** Keep coming back to those points – don’t let the conversation get derailed onto topics that are not relevant. Know how much time you have to make your points and tailor your presentation to match.
- **Give specific examples of how people are being impacted in the legislator’s district.** Use examples including personal stories and district specific facts and numbers. Be specific and concrete. Have a constituent or provider from their district (who has been prepped) at the meeting with you to talk about how the problem impacts them.
- **Be prepared to answer tough questions.** Think ahead of questions the legislator may ask you and how to answer them. It is okay to say you don’t know and get the information for them later.
- **Be ready to ask tough questions (see opposite page).** Politicians are professionals at getting people to like them. You should push back on the things they say and not be afraid to put tension into the conversation. If it feels a little uncomfortable that’s okay. This is your chance to advocate for your program and the cause that you believe in. If the legislator feels uncomfortable that is good - you are doing your job! They need to feel pressure and discomfort to move on these issues.
SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR YOUR LEGISLATORS

It is important to always have an “ask” of the legislator during the meeting. Some suggestions are below.

- Providers are closing, families are being cut off from services, and hard-working and highly trained workers are losing their jobs. [GIVE SOME EXAMPLES. Some are here.] What are you doing to make sure this doesn’t continue?
- Have you been advocating for your colleagues to choose revenue and avoid all cuts to vital state services our families rely on? Will you speak to them?
- Have you been speaking publicly about revenue solutions? Will you speak publicly in support of raising revenue to prevent cuts ahead of non-budget related items?
- When’s the last time you spoke to [Speaker Madigan (House Democrat), President Cullerton (Senate Democrat), Governor Rauner (Republican), Leader Durkin (House Republican), Leader Radogno (Senate Republican)] to urge them to reach across the aisle and work together on choosing revenue to fully-fund our services? When will you speak to him/her/them again?
- Who are you speaking with from the other party about solving this budget crisis? Who will you speak to?
- END WITH THIS QUESTION: When can we hear a progress report on what you’re personally doing to ensure that this budget crisis ends and all of our services are fully-funded?

Lawmakers are likely to make certain statements to deflect your advocacy efforts. Don’t accept these responses – push back! Be prepared for lawmakers to say:

Statement: I support your program.
Response: They only way to show support is by supporting adequate revenue. Will you support (the program/line item/issue) by pledging to vote to raise adequate revenue and pass a budget ahead of non-budget related items?

Statement: We need some cuts to (your program) or cuts to something else.
Response: The governor and lawmakers have many options to raise adequate revenue to prevent any cuts to (your program) and other services that people need.

Statement: We need “reforms” or “turnaround” agenda first before we can pass a budget.
Response: Passing a budget with adequate revenue to fully fund (your program) and other services that people need is the priority. It is the top responsibility of government and people are hurting now. Non-budget items should be discussed later.

Response: We’ve heard from domestic service providers and survivors that domestic violence victims and their children will die if they do not get funded. We’ve heard from homeless youth providers that homeless youth will be physically abused on the streets unless lawmakers choose revenue and fund homeless youth services. We’ve heard from the Editorial Board of the Rockford Register that the budget cuts are harming jobs and our local economy. [FEEL FREE TO ADD OR REPLACE THOSE EXAMPLES ABOVE WITH YOUR OWN] Isn’t it time to give up these non-budget issues? Do you think these issues are worth risking children’s safety and damaging our economy?

Statement: I have no power - you need to talk to someone else (Rauner, Madigan, democrats, republicans, etc.).
Response: You do have power and responsibility to the needs of your constituents. Will you talk to those leaders and advocate on behalf of us?