

## TPEA'S GUIDE TO GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

***According to Wikipedia, a grassroots movement uses people in each district, region, or community as the basis for political, social, or economic action. Grassroots movements are associated with bottom-up rather than top-down decision-making.***

As a state employee or retiree, you are a crucial part of the TPEA legislative team because only **you** can elect the people who will vote for state employees' and retirees' issues. Only **you** can tell candidates how the problems affect you. Whether it is letting them know how the lack of an across the board pay raise or not getting an annuity increase in over 20 years has impacted you and your family, or how important state paid insurance is to you, getting to know your local state representative or state senator is vital to getting the salary and benefits you work so hard for.

### **BASIC TIPS:**

1. **Act locally.** Most candidates have local offices and holds local meetings.
2. **Know the candidate.** Do your research, read your local paper, listen to your local radio station, or reach out to TPEA at [mail@tpea.org](mailto:mail@tpea.org) or 888-367-8732 and we will help you.
  - a. Is the candidate running as a Republican or a Democrat, liberal, moderate, or conservative?
  - b. What issues are the most important to them?
  - c. Is one of the candidates currently a state senator or state representative?
  - d. If the person is already a state representative or senator, on which committee(s) do they serve?
  - e. Is there something you have in common with the person so you can connect personally with the candidate?
3. Start with a **letter or a phone call.** Call or email before you go by the office.
4. Welcome a **meeting with staff** members. Staff members can be powerful and influential, often serving as gatekeepers who can help you

- communicate with their candidates. Staff members have a lot of discretion on who sees candidates, what is read by candidates.
5. Provide a **one-page fact sheet** outlining the issue and why it is important. Link to TPEA's fact sheets:  
<https://www.tpea.org/index.php/advocacy/advocacy-toolkit>
  6. Use personal stories about **how an issue affects you**.
  7. **Build a relationship** by touching base with the office more than one time. The candidate's staff will begin to know you by your first name, and the candidate will try to be available when you visit.
  8. You must be **honest, credible, and reasonable** to build a trusting relationship between you and the candidate.
    - a. If you need facts or information on a particular subject, contact TPEA at [mail@tpea.org](mailto:mail@tpea.org) or call us toll-free at 888-367-8732.
    - b. If you do not know the answer, say, "I don't know, but I'll get back to you," or let TPEA know and we will call them back with the answer.
  9. Show the candidate how **supporting state employees and retirees** will help them get elected.
  10. After a visit or telephone call with the candidate, **follow up** with an email or letter, thanking them for their time and summarizing what you heard the candidate say they would do. Add your phone number and/or email address to the letter, and let the recipient know to contact you for more information.
  11. Know what **other issues the candidate is working on** and help when you can.

### **REMEMBER:**

If you do these things, you will quickly become part of the candidate's support system and someone they call on for advice.

- ✓ Thank the candidate for meeting with you and their support or consideration.
- ✓ Be courteous, positive, direct, concise, factual, credible, and specific.
- ✓ Be enthusiastic (not emotional), and never get angry.
- ✓ Be a good listener. Your goal is to have a conversation.
- ✓ Treat the candidate as you would like to be treated.

- ✓ Establish a reputation for reliability and credibility.
- ✓ Be open to all questions even if you think they are silly or ill-informed.
- ✓ Consider the candidate[s] as bright, intelligent people who are not well-informed on your issue.
- ✓ Your credibility can sometimes be enhanced by saying, "I don't know, but I will get back to you." TPEA staff can help provide the appropriate answer so you can follow up.

### **DON'T:**

- ✗ Give inaccurate information.
- ✗ Never be rude or demanding; politeness, patience, and persistence will pay off.
- ✗ Publicly or privately complain about the candidate or a member of their staff.
- ✗ Hold grudges or give up.
- ✗ Be argumentative or abrasive.
- ✗ Do not fake it. If you do not know the answer to a question, say so. Don't guess, and don't ever "fake it" with a guess.

### **TIPS FOR CALLING LEGISLATIVE OFFICES:**

Be patient but persistent. Remember, candidates and staff are under time pressures. They may not return calls immediately or even the same day. There is nothing wrong with being persistent if you have not heard back after several days. **Work hard at building your credibility;** it is a tremendous asset – even if state employee and retiree issues are weak or unpopular.

### **SAMPLE CONVERSATION:**

Use the following sample as a guide in a personal conversation between a legislative candidate and **you – the visitor** – regarding an across-the-board state employee pay raise.

***VISITOR:** Good afternoon. I am\_, and I live in \_\_\_\_\_. I am a state employee with XYZ agency or a retiree with XYZ years of service. As you know, my home office is in your district.*

***VISITOR:** I am here today to speak with you (and your staff person,) about an across-the-board inflation pay raise for state employees. I have a one-page fact sheet on the issue, and I have written my contact information on it for your reference. If I can provide you with further information, please feel free to contact me.*

*Between 2015 and today, the inflation rate averaged 2.69% per year producing a cumulative price increase of 17.27%. The current year-over-year inflation rate (2020 to 2021) is now 6.81%.*

*The Legislature last increased take-home pay on September 1, 2014 (2%), and before that gave a one-time retention payment of \$800 in 2010-11. The 2017 Legislature passed with one hand what it took away with the other, granting a 2.5% salary increase to employees who contribute to the Employees Retirement System (ERS) to offset the 2.5% increase in the employee retirement contribution rate. Though targeted pay increases in some agencies were part of the budget for the current two-year cycle, most state employees were left out.*

***LEGISLATIVE OFFICIAL:** This is a very informative fact sheet. It provides me with some understandable figures about the issue that I can use if elected. I appreciate the information.*

The details of the conversation will vary from issue to issue. State employees' pay raises and retiree benefit increases are budget issues, and both items are funded in the appropriations bill. The successful candidate in your area may not be appointed to the appropriations or finance committee, but that does not mean their vote or opinion doesn't count.