

Talking Points for Meeting with Representatives & Senators

Visits to legislative offices for NMCDLA are a time for defense attorneys to share information about issues related to the impact of new or existing criminal laws, law enforcement behavior, the impact of specialty courts, procedural trial problems, sentencing ramifications, and ultimately your personal experiences with the criminal justice system in New Mexico and the financial and socio-economic impact these programs have on our communities.

If you don't have an appointment, make sure that your contact with the legislator is polite but to the point. Often you can grab their attention between committee meetings for only a few minutes due to the time constraints of committee meetings and floor votes. It is important to stay on message.

Identify yourself as being part of the New Mexico Criminal Defense Lawyers Legislative Drive-in. If you are a constituent, introduce yourself as a constituent, identifying the community where you live. People in their district, who can vote for them, have the biggest impact on their decisions. If you don't know who to contact, you can find out who represents you at:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Members/Find_My_Legislator

Know what you are asking for

Are they on a committee relevant to your issue? If so, you can ask for their support to kill, modify/amend, or pass the bill out of committee.

If not, ask for a yes or no vote when it gets to the floor. If only asking for a floor vote, a call to the office where they monitor support may help more than a personal visit. Use your time wisely.

Offer yourself as an expert. With New Mexico's citizen legislature many of our elected officials are not criminal lawyers and have a limited understand of the criminal justice system. Give them your business card or contact information and let them know you are available to be a resource for them should issues arise that they would like more background information on.

Make your argument for or against a bill compelling.

- Tie your issue to a specific bill before the committee they serve on
- Make the bill relevant to a personal story, humanize the issue (example, little Johnny was arrested with a joint and now can't get student loans for college)
- Highlight the economic impact of a bill (example, In 2007 4,213 arrests for marijuana offenses were made in New Mexico causing an unnecessary overcrowding in our county jails not to mention this practice takes our limited law enforcement resources away from perusing more serious drugs like meth and heroin)

Who to target

The bills relevant to NMCDLA are usually assigned to the Judiciary Committees in the House and Senate. These members are your best shot at impacting legislation before the bill gets to a floor vote.

Anyone on the finance committee is a good opportunity for you to discuss funding for the Public Defender's office and other defense resources.

It is always a good idea to touch base with your representatives even if they don't support your position. If they are not on a committee assigned to the legislation you are advocating for or against, they can still assist if the bill comes up for a floor vote. Having personal contact from a voter in their district can impact how they cast their vote.

Follow up

Personal contact is the first step to establishing a relationship with representatives and senators. However, the process of a bill becoming a law is a long one and it is unlikely that you will be at the Roundhouse for every step of it. Follow up on your visit today with an email or phone call to reassert your position and then do it again right before the floor vote. Attached is an alphabetical list of all representatives and senators that has their email and phone numbers. During session don't use their home addresses to send a personal note. It is unlikely that they will see it until after the session.