

Advocacy Tips for Budget Hearings **Wednesday, January 4, 2017**

WHERE:

Beginning at 10:00 AM

Fairfax County – Northern VA Community College at Annandale, Ernst Center Theater, 8333 Little River Turnpike Annandale, VA 22003

Abingdon – Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, Grand Hall, One Partnership Circle, PO Box 1987, Abingdon, VA 24212

Beginning at NOON

Newport News – Christopher Newport University, David Student Union, Ballroom, 1 Ave of the Arts, Newport News, VA 23606

Richmond – General Assembly Building, House Room D, 201 N 9th St, Richmond, VA 23219

LOGISTICS: You may sign up to speak one hour before the hearing begins. The line to sign up to speak will start forming hours earlier. Be prepared to wait, and consider having someone else sign you up.

RULES: If the rules are the same this year, each speaker will get 3 minutes—strictly enforced—and could possibly get cut to 2 minutes toward the end of the hearing. Someone else can sign you up to speak, but each person in line can only sign up one speaker.

WHO: You will be testifying in front of legislators who are members of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees who are from this area of the state. Those committees have the power to suggest amendments to the state budget the Governor proposes, and the full General Assembly will vote on those changes.

How to Prepare to Testify

- Write out your testimony and practice giving it while being timed- stay under 3 minutes. It is also more effective if you are not simply reading, but are able to make some eye contact with the legislators.
- Start by thanking them for the attention they have paid to the issue in the past or previous positive funding decisions they have made—or simply for the opportunity to be heard that day.
- Be personal. Share an aspect of your experience that relates to the change you are asking for.
- Use statistics sparingly. Facts and figures can be very effective if you limit them to one or two. Do not overwhelm them with numbers.

- Be specific. Make sure the legislators know what action you are looking for (please restore the funding cut proposed by the Governor, please add funding for waiver slots, etc.)
- Be respectful and polite! You can be a strong advocate while still being respectful of those with whom you do not always agree.
- Do not be discouraged if legislators come and go during the hearing. They will be sitting there for many hours without an official break.
- **If several people before you have already testified on the same subject, legislators will appreciate it if you shorten your comments to state your agreement with a previous speaker and only add what is different in your testimony from the other people's.**
- An effective way to show broad support for an issue is to have one or two people testify and ask the rest of your supporters to stand.
- Relax! Legislators are just people. And they are very sympathetic to human service issues, even if they don't always fund them at the levels we would like. You are not going to be questioned by them at a budget hearing.

How to Prepare to Talk to a Reporter

Reporters from the major newspapers and some television and radio stations report on the budget hearings. If you would like to talk to a reporter, be prepared to answer these questions:

- Why are you there?
- What specific action are you asking the legislators to take?
- What is the aspect of your personal experience that leads you to ask for this?

You will want to be brief and to the point. Keep your message simple. Practice your main points ahead of time.

Everyone has much more life experience with the issue than they are able to share with a reporter who is pressed for time and just needs a few sound bites. So be sure to think ahead of time about what aspect of your experience is most relevant to the funding request you are making.

Example:

"I am here today to help lawmakers understand that we need more community-based services for children with mental health disorders. Specifically, they need to provide more funding for crisis response and child psychiatry services in every region of the state. Here's why: My 9-year-old daughter is diagnosed with bipolar disorder. We had to wait 12 weeks to see a child psychiatrist because the demand is so high. Within two weeks of making the appointment, my daughter's condition deteriorated and she had to be hospitalized. We could have avoided that family trauma and the two weeks of missed school if there were better access to mental health services like child psychiatry and mobile crisis teams in my community."