

Tips For Lobbying Your Legislator During Difficult Budget Years

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REINTRODUCE YOUR LEGISLATOR TO YOUR LIBRARY

When you are visiting with your legislator, please take the opportunity to ask him or her to attend an event at your library. While we personally know of legislators who actively visit their local libraries, unfortunately many lawmakers have not set foot in one in a long time. It is not unusual for a legislator who does not have a particular attachment to a local library to ask us, "With the advancement of Barnes and Noble, do we even need libraries any more?"

Set up a mini event for your legislator, complete with a tour of the library, and feature an opportunity for them to visit with an adult literacy coach, and witness a children's program in progress, such as the Homework Help Centers, etc.

Invite the media, put out a press release, and ask your legislator to read to a group of children during story hour.

Ultimately this approach builds a relationship between you, your legislator, and your community, and may prove to be invaluable in the future.

"REFRESH" YOUR MESSAGE

As you can imagine, legislators have been bombarded over the last year with the same message from every conceivable interest group – "Don't cut me." CLA members should utilize a message that is more comprehensive than just: "Don't cut me."

Explain to your legislator that the 2009-2010 Budget does not contain any cuts to library programs such as the Public Library Foundation, Transaction Based Reimbursement, and English Acquisition and Literacy Program. Ask your legislator to continue to support public libraries and to resist talks of future cuts.

Note: Only a modest group of legislators – those who sit on the Budget subcommittees that hear library issues and the Education Committees - truly understand what the PLF, TBR, and Literacy Program are and who they serve. In fact, in September 2008 the Senate Republicans introduced a massive cuts proposal that would have eliminated the English Acquisition and Literacy Program. The program was targeted for elimination because of a belief that the literacy program "served non-English speakers" and "was duplicative" of existing K-12 programs. As you are aware, the English Acquisition and Literacy Program is a 25 year old program, administered by the California State Library, to support public libraries in their quest to assist functionally illiterate native English speaking adult learners to acquire basic literacy skills. In your meetings, assume that

your legislator is not aware of the details of the programs you are attempting to save from Budget cuts.

Explain to your legislator (returning Assembly and Senators as well as the newly elected members) that, the PLF, for example, has already sustained a 75 percent cut over the last few years. Be specific: Identify some of those programs that have suffered as a result:

- a) "I haven't been able to buy (#)___ new books for the shelves."
- b) "I will have to reduce library hours."
- c) "(#) people in my adult literacy program won't be served."

MARKET YOUR LIBRARY!

Many legislators simply do not know of the extensive services you provide. Pick three or four that are very unusual or popular and highlight them in your discussion. Explain what the modern day library provides to its patrons.

When the economy is bad, libraries are bursting at the seams. Individuals are using computers to search for jobs or polish their resumes. Families are checking out books and videos because they can't afford to buy them when dollars are tight. If this is your experience locally, please share some interesting statistics or examples.

Finally, be sure to leave information for your legislator about your library and the programs you provide!