

WORKING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Government officials, from Congressmen to school board members, can have a significant effect on policies that support the KidsWalk-to-School program. Elected officials need up-to-date information and data to make informed decisions. Be sure to give them visible support for any stands or actions they take that promote livable community issues.

Tips for Working with Elected Officials:

- Organize. At this point you already have an identified group of individuals and organizations who are interested in a common goal — making your community safer for children to walk to school. This is important because organized groups have more credibility and influence than individuals; a mix of people bring valuable and different perspectives to the issues; and groups and organizations bring increased community contacts and awareness to your efforts.
- Don't give up — be persistent. If public officials know that you are not going to go away they will eventually work with you. When the next project comes along they will be more likely to listen to you and may seek your advice.
- Provide solutions and alternatives. Express your concerns and your reasoning clearly. Listen with an open mind to the needs of your opponents. Try to offer alternatives that can meet their needs and still achieve your objectives.
- Respect your opponents — be courteous. A relationship of mutual respect will pay off again and again.
- Get expert help. Get help from traffic engineers, landscape architects, grassroots groups, and lawyers. These allies can provide general background advice, write letters of support, and provide technical services when developing a plan to present to public officials.

Action Steps for Working with Elected Officials:

- Write letters to politicians asking for support for KidsWalk-to-School. Know their voting records and positions on matters related to transportation and land use.
- Attend zoning, parks and recreation, school board and public works meetings. Ask that pedestrian issues be included on the agenda. Insist that these issues be considered each time a decision is made.
- Urge support for increased funding for safe routes for pedestrians and bicyclists in the community.
- Help build a political advocacy base. Join a network of other individuals who care about these issues and help to keep each other informed and active.
- Arrange to visit local politicians' offices. Bring written material describing your views, and bring influential experts such as political donors, community leaders, or medical professionals.
- Hold a community meeting and invite local politicians to attend.
- Set up a table in a well-traveled area such as a community event or the local market, where petitions, postcards, or letters can be collected and delivered to politicians representing that district.

- Invite politicians to visit the neighborhood and join a KidsWalk-to-School group on a walk to school one morning or afternoon.
- Find out where politicians will be speaking. Attend and ask questions about these issues.
- Place a paid local newspaper advertisement aimed at political decision makers.
- Hold a news conference with a supportive politician to spotlight policy needs, pending legislation, community projects, or other media events.
- Vote. Help register others to vote. Join get-out-the-vote efforts on election day.

For more information see *Guide to Bicycle Advocacy* (Bikes Belong, see Resources p. 46) and *Improving Pedestrian Access to Transit — An Advocacy Handbook* (WalkBoston, see Resources p. 47).