ABA Day Tip Sheet
By William K. Weisenberg, Ohio State Bar Association

Having participated in ABA Day for several years, OSBA developed a brief “travel kit” reminder of things to do, and remember, when heading off to Washington to visit with our Congressional delegation. One thing for sure, take a good look at the “11 Steps to a Successful Visit” prepared by the ABA Governmental Affairs Office. It is on their website for ABA Day and it is most helpful (www.abanet.org/poladv/abaday09/hillvisits/home.shtml).

1. Either e-mail or fax a letter to the scheduler of each member. Tell them when you are going to be in D.C., what issues you want to discuss and who is coming in “your” delegation, e.g. president, president-elect. We request they contact us by e-mail or phone to set up the meeting. This is no substitute for a personal call to set the meeting.

2. Once the schedule is set, send a confirming e-mail or fax. List again who will be in the delegation making the visit. The member of Congress may well recognize a name when being briefed about the visit. Enter the scheduling information on the ABA GAO online scheduling software. GAO will be able to provide pertinent information with regard to visits, e.g. impact of funding increases/decreases on LSC programs in a state or congressional district. GAO may be able to send an ABA photographer to capture the moment for the delegate and member of Congress.

3. Depending on the size of your Congressional delegation, try and schedule consecutive meetings in the same Congressional office building so as to avoid running back and forth and down long corridors. Experience evidences consideration by members when you bring this to the attention of the scheduler.

4. Give yourself some time, e.g. 20-30 minutes before meetings. The hallways are long and we tend to fall behind on schedules. We need to be on time, although members may be delayed by other meetings, hearings or floor sessions. It is always better to be on time!

5. Be prepared! Time is precious. Legislators and staff have limited time, even when they know you.

6. After introducing your delegation to the legislator and staff, have your spokesperson selected to present each issue you are lobbying on. This will move the discussion along with the limited time available. Have the captain of the group, your lobbyist-coordinator facilitate introductions and game plan.

7. Have a concise (one-page) summary of the presentation; bullet points with brief narrative; ABA provides excellent one-pager on each issue.

8. Personalize the issue – give examples of how the issue affects the legislator’s constituents, e.g. increase or decrease in LSC funding and delivery of services in the district. Always have one good example.

9. Make you point quickly. This is not the Court of Appeals.
10. The staff person, chief of staff, legislative director, is very important. Get to know him/her. Exchange business cards. Make sure they get a copy of all handouts you have. They will brief the legislator in the future, and in most cases become your key contact. Send them an e-mail as soon as you get back to the office thanking them for the visit. Also, let them know you can be a resource on other issues that may arise.

11. There is a reason we have made the visit. We want the legislator to support our position either by voting pro or con or we might want them to contact a colleague in support of our position. Remember to ask them to take a specific action and thank them. Think like a candidate – ask for their vote!!

12. If the scheduler is around, make a point to personally thank them. Each staff person is important and we are building relationships.

13. Write a letter to the member of Congress as soon as we get home thanking them for their time and reminding them of the issue and position we are advocating. Remember to remind the member of what we agreed to, e.g. cosponsor legislation, sign a letter such as the LSC letter. Again, a letter to the key staff person is just as important. We will be communicating with them again.

14. DO NOT FORGET TO COMPLETE THE ABA HILL VISIT FORM, EITHER HARD COPY OR ONLINE. THIS ASSISTS GAO STAFF WITH FOLLOW-UP, E.G. WHETHER THE MEMBER AGREED TO SIGN A LETTER, COSPONSOR A BILL. ALSO, MAKE SURE TO LIST CONGRESSIONAL STAFF AT THE MEETING.

15. Be polite, engaging and yourself.

There may be times that the member of Congress disagrees with our position. Staff may also communicate this to us.

Remember this throughout all visits and in everything we do:

“Just because we disagree doesn’t mean we have to be disagreeable!!”

We may be in agreement on other issues.

Finally –

Have fun!

It is great to see old friends from the Statehouse and meet new members of Congress.

OH! Take plenty of business cards and have extra copies of the ABA one-pagers and your own materials. Keep it simple and brief!

KEEP A COPY OF THIS KIT IN YOUR POCKET!!