



**CALIFORNIA TOBACCO  
ENDGAME CENTER FOR  
ORGANIZING AND ENGAGEMENT**  
A project of the American Heart Association.

# CAPITOL INFORMATION & EDUCATION DAYS



## Handling Tough Questions & Situations During Legislative Meetings

### Scenario #1

**A legislator or staffer starts talking about a bill and wants your opinion about it, or your support to help pass it.**

**Response:** Acknowledge the request respectfully and then pivot back to our talking points. If the subject of the bill is related to health, the environment, seniors, or youth protections, you could use that as a bridge back to our messages.

*“Thank you for sharing this with us. We’re not able to address specific legislation or engage in any lobbying activity. It sounds like you’re deeply committed to protecting your community, and that’s exactly why we’re here today. Community groups are working to share the truth about emerging nicotine products to protect public health. We’d be interested in connecting with your district staff to explore ways we can partner.”*

### Scenario #2

**The legislator or staffer asks if our focus on the nicotine crisis means that smoking is no longer a problem.**

**Response:** \_\_\_\_\_

*“Not at all. While cigarette smoking remains a major public health concern, we’re here to tell you about California’s rapidly growing nicotine crisis. The tobacco and nicotine industry is aggressively promoting new, high-nicotine products and marketing them as a ‘better alternative’ to help people quit smoking. However, these products are designed to keep people addicted, not to help them quit. That’s why it’s essential for our communities to understand and access proven, effective ways to quit successfully.”*

### Scenario #3

**A legislator or staffer seems unsupportive of nicotine or tobacco prevention and makes comments about personal freedom, that we’ve passed enough laws against tobacco, or that people already know smoking is unhealthy.**

**Response:** \_\_\_\_\_

*“We respect personal choice. Our concern is that nicotine addiction complicates true choice, especially when risks are downplayed. Today’s nicotine products are engineered to be highly addictive and marketed in ways that appeal to youth and encourage lifelong use. According to the CDC, most people who use tobacco or nicotine—especially young people—want to quit, but many lack accurate information or support. That’s why education and access to evidence-based cessation strategies matter.”*

#### Scenario #4

### The legislator or staffer is not engaging with the group and seems distracted or uninterested.

**Response:** This can happen, especially at this time of the year when the legislature is very busy. If this occurs, try re-engaging by asking a question about what they are hearing from constituents. *“What do you hear from your constituents about the growing use of nicotine products, such as vapes and pouches?”* or *“Do you see tobacco and nicotine product waste in parks and other public areas when you are home in the district?”* This is also a great opportunity to respond with local data.

#### Scenario #5

### You don't know the answer to a question they asked.

**Response:** It's ok to say you don't have an answer right now. Share with them that you will follow up with them via email or schedule a meeting at their local district office.

#### Scenario #5

### The legislator or staffer asks, “What can I do to help?”

**Response:** \_\_\_\_\_

*“We’re asking you to help us fight the Nicotine and Tobacco Industry by combatting California’s growing nicotine crisis. You can play a critical role by:*

- 1) Sharing the truth about high-nicotine products and their risk for addicting a whole new generation of kids.***
- 2) Promoting Evidence-Based Cessation Strategies and Services, including the Kick It California Quitline, to ensure residents can access free and effective treatment.***
- 3) Connecting with your local coalitions and community partners so you can stay informed about district-specific trends, activities, and community prevention efforts.”***