

Visit your Elected Officials:

A Step by Step Legislative Advocacy Guide

Constituents visiting their elected representatives at district offices can be powerful voices in advocating for positive legislation.



Before the Visit - Be Prepared

1. Arrange your visit and make an appointment with the Representative's scheduler two-three weeks in advance. Ask to meet with your Representative, stressing that you are a constituent by stating the zip code where you reside. Be sure to include all individuals that will be in the meeting. Depending on legislative developments, it may be necessary to meet with staff rather than the legislator. Since legislators rely heavily on their professional staff's opinion, this is also a very important meeting.

2. Research your legislators' voting records, committee assignments, professional experience, etc. Have well-reasoned facts and figures on your issue(s) ready, but do not be overwhelming. Be ready to answer questions and (when necessary) respond to counter-arguments.

3. Set an objective for the visit. Do you want your legislator to take a position on an issue or a specific bill? Limit the number of issues to be discussed. Prepare a "leave-behind" information packet. This packet can include fact sheets and stories supporting your issues, bundles of constituent letters, and any appropriate briefing materials. A specific request for action should also be included (two to three paragraphs articulating the legislative action requested, and why that action should be taken).

During the Visit

1. Offer a firm handshake and begin the visit by introducing yourself/ves and your issue. State the purpose of your visit – why you are there. Emphasize that you are a constituent – that is key.

2. Describe your role in the community and how you can help the Representative or Senator understand the local impact of legislation.

3. Give an overview of the issues you want to discuss and any background information you may have.

Present The Issues

1. Discuss each issue separately. Be positive and constructive. Do not assume that the member is an expert on the issues. Provide background information to leave at the end of the meeting.

2. Provide human interest stories. How would specific legislation affect your community?

3. Make your "ask". Ask what position your legislator takes on the issue. Ask even if you think you already know. Hearing how your legislator communicates his or her point of view will help you to better craft your message in the future. Then, make a specific request for an action that you would like your legislator to take.

4. Conclude by asking the member or aide to take some concrete action on your behalf: cosponsor specific legislation, or send a letter to other members on the appropriate committee. Get a response regarding his or her position on the issue(s).

5. Don't overstay your welcome. Conclude the visit by again extending the appropriate thank you and offer the Representative or staff member your "leave behind" packet and a business card with your email address and phone number. Reaffirm your intention to forward any information or materials which were requested by the Representative or staff.

Problems May Occur

1. You may be asked questions for which you do not know the answers. Tell the member or aide that you will find out the answer and get back to them.

2. The member or aide may disagree with you. Do not argue with him or her. Respond positively, respecting his or her position and offer to supply information as to why you hold your position.

What's Next?

1. Write a thank you letter in which you summarize the discussion.

2. Follow-up on commitments made during the meeting, especially if you said you would provide additional information.