

Tips for Meeting Your Legislator

Plan your meeting. Decide whether you are going alone or with others. If you go as a group, decide who is going to lead the meeting and what each person is going to contribute to the discussion. This will help eliminate awkward silence or repetitive messages and will ensure that you hit all the key points you want to cover. You will likely have only 15-20 minutes for your meeting, so plan accordingly.

Make an appointment ... but don't be surprised if it changes. Legislators often have last-minute hearings or committee meetings. **Be flexible.**

Know your audience. Do a little research about your legislator if you don't know him or her. Once you're in the door, begin by finding something personal that you have in common with the legislator. Engage in a little "small talk" to break the ice—but keep it brief. If at all possible, find out his or her position on the issues you're focusing on.

Define your message. Tell your legislator that you are visiting to ask for his or her support for your issue. Plan to present two or three observations that get at the heart of your position. Personalize the message by describing your loved one or patient(s)!

Meet in your home district. Meetings in the home district are often less hurried than meetings at the Capitol, and they provide the "home turf" advantage. Find out when your legislator is in his or her home district and schedule your appointment then, or if your workplace illustrates your position, invite them to visit you. If that's not possible, travel to the Capitol.

Invite comments and questions. Engage your legislator in dialogue. Don't worry if they ask you something you don't know the answer to—simply tell them you don't know, but that you'll find out and get back to him/her.

Prepare written "leave-behind" information and pictures: It helps to provide your legislator with brief, written information and pictures of your family member for further reflection. Make sure it contains the local angle for your district, if at all possible.

Ask for a commitment. If you don't ask your legislator for action, you won't see any. If they decline, encourage them to think about it, and let them know you'll keep in touch.

Follow up. Send a handwritten thank-you note to your legislator. Let them know that you appreciate the time. If you promised to provide additional information, provide it or let them know how and when they can expect to receive it.

Visit more than once. Over time, visit with your legislator to continue to discuss issues and make requests as they arise. Be sure to be a reliable source of information for them on your issue by delivering what you promise, avoiding overstatement, and communicating clearly.

When meeting with your legislator, **don't be tempted to overstate your case**, fudge the facts, exaggerate, or guess. If you do, you'll never be trusted again.