

CONTACTING YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Contrary to what you may believe, elected officials want to hear from the people in the communities they represent. They want to know what matters to you – so tell them!

Find who represents you in Congress

Go online to: <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members> and enter your address to identify your U.S. Representative and Senators. Follow the links to their official websites to find Member background, office locations, contact information, and district news.

Visit his/her office

An in-person meeting with an elected official (or someone from his/her staff) is an incredibly powerful tool for ensuring that your voice is heard. Legislators want to hear from their constituents, and they really take notice when someone from the community they represent makes time to come to his/her office to deliver a personal message about what matters most.

Make appointments in advance

1. If you are not a constituent or don't have a constituent to accompany you, don't try it. You will find that many legislators won't even accept emails from people who are not in their districts. Think strategically about constituents to include to be part of the meeting to have maximum impact.
2. Start by finding out the name of the legislator's scheduler either through the website or by phone. Email the scheduler a formal letter requesting a meeting, indicating who will be attending and what issue you want to address. Be flexible in suggesting times or leave it to the scheduler.
3. Follow up the email with a phone call.
4. If the scheduler says that the legislator doesn't have time to see you but a staff member familiar with your issue can, take them up on it.

Before the meeting

1. Learn what you can about the legislator and his/her positions. Research what committees they sit on. Material is available on their websites. In addition, be familiar with the arguments opposing your position and be prepared to address them.
2. Formulate your thoughts in a few precise sentences and run through the planned agenda for the meeting in advance. Finalize the group that will participate in the meeting and assign roles/agenda items for each person.
3. Keep up to date on the politics around your issue and the progress of the legislation. Consider emailing the staff in advance of the meeting with a copy of the leave-behind material or key talking points so that they can adequately prepare and your conversation will remain on topic.

Be precise and focused

Don't present a laundry list of issues. Deal with the one that is most important at the time and make sure your talking points are clear, direct and specifically related to the issue. You may as little as 15 minutes for your meeting, so it is important to use your time wisely.

If you have a personal or local example, use it

Legislators and staff will be most interested in local stories or data that they have not previously accessed.

Make a clear request for what you want from this meeting

If there is a pending bill, know the number of the bill and ask specifically if you want the legislator to be a co-sponsor or supporter. Make sure your request is timely.

Don't overlook the influence of staff members

Cultivating relationships with staffers can be extremely useful. Although many of them are young, they may be as knowledgeable or more so than the elected official for whom they work. Be as respectful of staff as you are of the legislator and don't be afraid to ask for advice in approaching your issue.