

## Tips on Meeting a Member of Congress

Meeting with a member of Congress or a congressional staff member is a very effective way to convey a message about a specific legislative issue. Below are some suggestions to consider when planning a visit to a congressional office.

- **Plan Your Visit Carefully:** Be clear about what it is you want to achieve; determine in advance which member or committee staff member you need to meet with to achieve your purpose.
- **Make an Appointment:** When attempting to meet with a member, contact the Appointment Secretary or Scheduler to explain your purpose and who you represent. It is easier for a congressional staff member to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and your relationship to the area or interests represented by the member.
- **Be Prompt and Patient:** When it is time to meet with a member, be punctual and be patient. It is not uncommon for a Congressman or Congresswoman to be late or to have a meeting interrupted due to the member's crowded schedule. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with a member of staff.
- **Be Prepared:** Whenever possible, bring to the meeting information and materials supporting your position. Members are required to take positions on many different issues. In some instances, a member may lack vital details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is therefore helpful to share information and examples that clearly demonstrate the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation.
- **Be Political:** Members of Congress want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Wherever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the member's constituency. If possible, describe for the member how you or your group can be of assistance. Where it is appropriate, remember to ask for a commitment.
- **Be Responsive: Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information if the member expresses interest or asks questions.** Follow up the meeting with a thank you letter that outlines the different points covered during the meeting and send along any additional information and materials requested.

## Tips on Writing a Member of Congress

A letter or email is the most popular choice of communication when contacting a congressional office. Information about sending an email or a letter is available on each member's website.

Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter or email. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly, e.g., House bill: H.R. \_\_\_\_, Senate bill: S \_\_\_\_\_. Be courteous, stick to the point, and include key information, using examples to support your position. Address only one issue in each letter or email, and, if possible, keep the letter to one page.

You should address your correspondence:

- To a Senator:

*The Honorable (Full Name)*  
*United States Senate*  
*Washington, D.C. 20510*  
*Dear Sen. (Last Name):*

- To a Representative:

*The Honorable (Full Name)*  
*House of Representatives*  
*Washington, D.C. 20515*  
*Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. (Last Name):*

- When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as:

*Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman: or Dear Mr. Speaker:*

When addressing correspondence to a recently elected member of Congress who has not been sworn in yet, it is proper to address them as:

- To a Senator:

*The Honorable (Full Name)*  
*Senator-elect*  
*United States Senate*  
*Washington, D.C. 20510*  
*Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. (Last Name):*

- To a Representative:

*The Honorable (Full Name)*  
*Representative-elect*  
*House of Representatives*  
*Washington, D.C. 20515*  
*Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. (Last Name):*

## Tips on Calling a Member of Congress

The phone numbers for your senators and representatives are available on their respective websites. You can also call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask for your senator's or representative's office.

Click here (<https://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites>) to access the legislators for your state. Once there will be a "find my legislator". You will need to enter the address to identify the legislator for your home/work district.

- Telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member, not the member of Congress. Identify yourself as a constituent and state your name, your hometown and the issue about which you wish to comment. Always be polite in your tone and language, and do not assume that the person initially taking your call is familiar with the issue you are calling to discuss.
- If you are transferred to the Health Legislative Assistant or if you are placed into the staffer's voicemail, reintroduce yourself and identify the topic you are calling to discuss.
- If you are instructed to leave a message with the receptionist, repeat your name and continue with the message that you wish to deliver, such as, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am a nurse practitioner from \_\_\_\_\_, and I would like to speak with the Health Legislative Assistant about a piece of legislation that pertains to NPs."
- Make a few brief points as to why the issue is of concern to you, your community and the nation, and note why the member should take action. You may want to use written notes to help you stay on topic and remain clear while articulating your message.
- Be clear about what you are asking the member to do (e.g., cosponsor a particular bill).
- Keep your call brief, unless the staffer asks you questions and seems engaged in the discussion. Offer to send additional or follow-up information to the staffer and request their preferred mode of communication (e.g., email address).
- Thank the staffer for his or her time and indicate that you appreciate his or her willingness to listen and record your comments. Be sure to record the name of the staffer and the day and time you spoke so you can have it for future use and in case you need to follow up. It is important to keep in touch with the offices of your member of Congress to establish a relationship with the member and staff and make yourself available as a resource.

## Tips for Meeting Legislators/Testifying

1. Know the Process and Players
  - Who is sponsoring the bill?
    - What is the motive/intent?
    - Did a specific organization/entity ask them to sponsor?
    - What was the driving force?
  - Who supports or opposes the bill and why?
    - Consider what their talking points will be when preparing your story/testimony.
    - Knowing the opposing party's points will help you to be more specific with your testimony.
  - Be familiar with your legislators, committee chairs, committee members, and legislative staff. Profile the legislator or the committee depending on if you are having a personal meeting with a legislator or testifying.
    - You should develop relationships with those in your district. But think bigger! Who are the legislators where you work? Who are the legislators of the patients you serve?
    - Don't discount staff members! They are important and can carry a lot of weight with the legislator. If you cannot have a meeting with the legislator, take it with the staff members.
    - Find out all you can about the legislators, committee chairs and members.
    - What legislation have they sponsored? What are their interests?
    - What are the demographics of their district? What is the health care needs/challenges of their community? Think Access To Care!
  - Let the sponsor of the bill or key legislators know beforehand you are testifying on the bill.
    - They need to hear your story beforehand!
    - They also have information that you may not have.
    - They may also ask that you address a specific point of view that may be needed to sway committee members.
2. Know the purpose of your testimony. Know your why!!
  - Understand why you are testifying.
    1. Are you there to persuade, dissuade, provide expertise, or delay action on a bill?
      - Develop your talking points based on your position.
      - Consider the opposing parties' possible talking points.

- What are your points of contention? What are the solutions? Are there points that can be negotiated?
2. Know how to separate out the important points of your testimony to ensure you are heard.
- You typically have limited time to present your points. Most testimony is limited to 3 minutes. When meeting with legislators, time may be limited. That's why it is important to create a 3 minute "elevator pitch". Have several of them prepared with different overarching points. Use the one that is most pertinent for the person you are talking with.

## ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF TESTIMONY: HEAR ME ROAR!

