

TIPS FOR LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS

Plan the Meeting

Decide who will attend the meeting; usually 2-5 people can fit comfortably in an office and have a good group interaction. Each person who attends is unofficially representing others in the district who hold similar opinions. Therefore, try to make your group as diverse as possible demographically speaking. The unspoken message to the legislator will be that young and old, male and female and members of different racial or ethnic groups support your issue.

Schedule the Meeting

Call the district office and ask to speak with the person who handles the legislator's schedule. Tell the scheduler the date and time you would like to meet with your legislator (be flexible) and the topic you wish to discuss. Mention that those attending are constituents (live and vote in the district). Request a meeting for 30 minutes; agree to 20 minutes if the office is busy. If someone in your group knows the legislator personally or professionally, make sure that the scheduler is aware of the relationship.

If the scheduler is not available, get his/her name from whoever answers the phone and ask for the scheduler's email address and fax number. Ask if the scheduler prefers to receive visit requests by fax or email. Then type a meeting request form and fax or email it to the scheduler. Wait a day or two, then call the scheduler and ask if your request was received, and if he/she can confirm the date and time. Be persistent yet polite.

Meeting with Staff

If your legislator can't meet with your group, don't feel snubbed. Meet with the staff member who works on health issues, or meet with the highest ranking aide possible in the local office, e.g. the Senior Aide. Staffers do all the background research on issues and often recommend positions to the legislator. Convincing a staffer to support your position is a powerful achievement.

Research your Representative

Google your legislator. Check out his/her official government website, plus any additional pertinent information your search may bring up. You can also visit votesmart.org.

You will be able to find biographical information, committee and subcommittee assignments, and key issues of concern for your Member. Review your legislator's voting record and any publicly stated views or opinions. See if your legislator is a co-author of the state (or federal) single payer legislation. The information you gather will help you decide which arguments may be most effective to persuade.

Have a Pre-meeting with your Group

Decide who will introduce the group as a whole and state the purpose of the visit. Everyone else in the group should pick a particular talking point and learn to present it well. One or more members of the group may also want to present a personal story. Decide who will say what, and give everyone the opportunity to speak.

The Legislative Meeting

Arrive early.

Introductions

Introduce your group as a whole and the reason for meeting, then introduce yourselves individually and mention your occupation. Mention that you live in the district and if you happen to have voted for the member, be sure to mention that as well.

Make your case

Present your talking points and your personal stories. Dialogue with the legislator and/or the staffer. Ask the legislator's position if you don't know it already. Be diplomatic. If you are asked a question to which you do not know the answer, say you will find the information and forward it to the office.

Stay on message! Don't spend too much time on introductions; make sure you get through the talking points. Don't disagree with your colleagues during the meeting.

Present your 'ask'

Ask the legislator to support single payer legislation (review "Our Key Asks").

Conclusion

Thank the legislator/staffer for his/her time. Get the staffer's business card. Leave your packet of information for the legislator, as well as your contact information.

Follow Up

Remember: This meeting shouldn't be an end in itself. Think of it as the beginning of a relationship with your legislator that will allow you to voice your opinion on topics in the future.

Send a thank you note to the legislator and/or staffer. Send any requested information that you promised to send. Periodically call or email the staffer to follow up on your 'ask'.

Fill out a visit report form and send it to your District Leader coordinator. As a minimum, mention if the legislator supports or opposes the legislation and note his/her reasons why.