

Meet Your Elected Official

Step up and take action! A personal meeting with your elected official can be incredibly effective in persuading that official to support your cause. It is an opportunity for you or your group to sit down face-to-face with a key decision-maker to convey your thoughts on an issue and to urge her/him to respond in a certain way. Take the time to prepare for the meeting because meeting times are often limited, so you will want to use the time wisely.

Preparing for the Meeting

- **Find out who your elected officials are.** Visit <http://cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/cgafindleg.asp> and enter your zip code to find your Connecticut State Legislators. Use www.house.gov to determine who represents you in the U.S. House of Representatives. Visit www.senate.gov and select your state to identify your two U.S. Senators. On both of these websites, you will find links to your members of Congress' websites to obtain their contact information.
- **Determine the location(s) of your elected official's office(s).** Most local and state elected officials only have one office; however, members of Congress have offices in their home state and in Washington, DC. Many Senators have multiple offices in their home state, so check to see which one is located near you. Keep in mind that you can schedule a meeting with your Member of Congress in her/his home state office; it is not necessary for you to travel to Washington, DC for a meeting.
- **Contact the office to schedule the meeting.** Call the elected official's office to ask what the meeting request process is (i.e. call, mail or fax in the request). If you need to fax the request, be sure to obtain the Scheduler's fax number, which may be different from the main fax number found online. Be prepared to give the following information: preferred date/times; number of people attending the meeting (if you are going with others); the affiliations you will represent; your contact info; and the issue(s) you would like to discuss. If you are not able to get a meeting with your elected official, ask to meet with the aide who deals with children's issues. He or she will pass on your concerns to the elected official.
- **Conduct research on your issue(s).** The elected official's website is a resource to learn where she/he stands on various issues. It is also important to gather local and state facts/information to illustrate the issue's impact on the area your elected official represents.
- **Develop an agenda or talking points for the meeting.** Decide on the key talking points for the meeting and determine the order in which you'd like to present your information. If you attend the meeting as a group, designate one or two people who will "lead" the conversation. This will help keep your message and the presentation of information clear and organized. Ensure that everyone in the group supports and will deliver the same message.

* Adapted from The Children's Defense Fund at:

http://www.childrensdefense.org/take-action/advocacy-that-works/meet-your-elected-official.html#Preparing_for_the_Meeting

At the Meeting

- **Prepare to answer questions on the point(s) you address.** If your elected official asks you questions to which you don't have the answers, simply say you will look into the issue and reply back right away. This also gives you another opportunity to contact the office.
- **Provide informational documents that support your position.** Leave a fact sheet or other materials that reinforce your position and the action(s) you would like to see taken.
- **Ask the elected official where she/he stands on the issue you are discussing.** Ask the elected official if you can count on his/her support on the issue(s) you discussed. If your elected official or their staff disagrees or is noncommittal, don't threaten or argue with her/him because it is counterproductive. A better strategy may include scheduling another meeting with different constituents to show broad support for your position or sending a packet of letters from constituents. If the elected official is unfamiliar with the legislation/issue, ask her/him to review the materials you are leaving behind and say that you will follow-up in two weeks for their response.
- **Verify follow-up information.** Confirm proper contact information for the person with whom you should follow up.

Following the Visit

- **Send a "thank you" for the opportunity to meet.** Write a thank you letter to the elected official for taking time to meet with you and listening to your concerns. Enclose any documentation you had agreed to provide to bolster your position and briefly restate your views and what you would like him/her to do.
- **Follow your elected official's position and actions on the issue.** Monitor how the elected official votes and send him/her your thoughts on their position. If the elected official votes with your position on the issue, recognize that vote with a written "thank you." If the elected official votes against your position, write or call to express your disappointment and urge reconsideration of the issue the next time it comes up for a vote.
- **Maintain your commitment to the issue.** Continue to follow the issue and to advocate on behalf of children!

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