

# Follow These Tips for a Successful Meeting with Your Legislator



## MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

Meeting with your legislator is the most effective advocacy technique and makes a powerful statement because it demonstrates your passion and commitment as a physician advocate.

The most important point to remember when meeting with a legislator or a staff person is that you are there as a physician advocating for the best interests of your patients and your profession. Your goal is to explain to them from your perspective how a bill or issue impacts your patients and your practice.

[Click here](#) to enter your address and get a list of your federal representatives, state legislators, and your local polling place.

## PREPARATION



- Contact the MMS Government Relations staff at [advocacy@mms.org](mailto:advocacy@mms.org) to let them know you would like to meet with your legislator. It's important for staff to be aware of member communications with legislators, and they may be able to provide you with valuable background information about your legislator and their position on specific issues.
- When you email the legislator's office to request a meeting, state the purpose of your meeting, where you live and/or practice, and who will be attending.
- Remember, legislators' first responsibility is to their constituents, so they prefer to meet with them. Many are also comfortable meeting with physicians who practice in their district because your patients are their constituents.
- Prepare for your meeting, including your talking points, anecdotes, and any materials you will want to leave behind with the legislator.
- Find out where the bill is in the legislative process, whether your legislator is on a committee with jurisdiction over the bill (meaning they will probably be more engaged in the issue), and whether they have taken a position to date (including if they are a cosponsor).
- Have an agenda with clearly identified asks (e.g. please co-sponsor/vote for bill XXX) and ask staff in advance how much time you will have so you can plan accordingly.

## EXPECTATIONS



- Don't be surprised if you are not able to speak directly to the legislator. Often, staff members meet with constituents; treat them in the same manner as you would your legislator.
- A realistic expectation for your meeting is 15 to 30 minutes. Build the prospect of delay into your schedule.
- Likewise, your visit is subject to interruption for any number of reasons (e.g., floor votes). Please accept these interruptions gracefully and continue the meeting with staff if present.

## DOS AND DON'TS

- ✓ **DO** try to understand the legislator's position: the factors, pressures, and forces affecting them.
- ✓ **DO** always bring the conversation back to the impact on your patients and your practice.
- ✓ **DO** use patient stories to humanize the issue.
- ✗ **DON'T** get too technical or use complex medical jargon. Clearly state your case at the outset and stay on message.
- ✗ **DON'T** debate the legislator or staff or malign anyone's position.
- ✗ **DON'T** try to negotiate.



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## AT THE MEETING



- Be punctual.
- Start by thanking the legislator and staff for taking the time to meet with you.
- Introduce yourself, who you are, what you do and where, and the issues you are interested in talking about. Ask them if there are issues they would like to discuss with you.
  - If you are in a group, determine the group leader in advance and decide who will cover which topic. If you have a large group, understand that not everyone is going to get a chance to talk, which is fine.
- Begin by stating the bill number(s) that you will discuss. Be clear and concise about the issue, your concerns, your position, and your ask.
- Present your opinion with facts, data, and, most importantly, a personal story. Explain from your perspective how the issues will impact the legislator's constituents (e.g., your practice and your patients). It is your personal and professional experience, your medical expertise, and your credibility as a physician that make your advocacy powerful.
- Use a personal story or anecdote that exemplifies the issue that you are discussing. Stories can be powerful tools to humanize abstract issues; if you don't have one from your practice, share another colleague's story.
- To the extent possible, know and understand opposing arguments and be prepared to discuss them.
- Allow the legislator or staff person to respond. The goal is to have a conversation. Be a good listener.
  - If they agree with you, ask what they may be willing to do to help advance the issue.
  - If they don't have a position, ask if there is specific information that could be useful.
  - If they disagree with you, don't be argumentative or disrespectful.
- Answer questions to the best of your ability. If you don't know the answer, say, "I don't know, but I'll get back to you," and then follow up with the information.
- Volunteer yourself as a source of local expertise on issues impacting patients and/or the practice of medicine.
- Always end the meeting by thanking the legislator and staff for taking the time to meet.

## AFTER THE MEETING

- Email the MMS Government Relations team at [advocacy@mms.org](mailto:advocacy@mms.org) to let them know about the meeting and the outcome.
- Send a thank-you email that restates each "ask" and includes any relevant information or materials that were discussed during the meeting.
- Answer any questions you couldn't answer in the meeting.



## TIPS FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

If you can't make it to the State House, meeting virtually is a great alternative. While the core principles of an in-person legislative meeting apply, there are best practices for virtual meetings, including:

- Keep your video on and use your full name. This will help your legislator identify you and put a face to the name.
- Body language and facial expressions say a lot, even virtually. Conduct yourself as if you were physically in front of the legislator.
- Always keep yourself on mute when you're not talking.
- Use the chat feature wisely, keeping in mind these chats are available to everyone in the meeting and can be saved and kept on digital record. Never type anything you would not say directly to a legislator.



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