



In-Person Meetings with Your Law Maker

(Adapted from <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/civic/article/555173>)

Personal Meetings

One of the most effective ways to advocate with your legislators is to meet face-to-face with them. Because of the hectic legislative pace, it is difficult to predict a legislator's availability during the legislative session. Nevertheless, if legislators know that their constituents have traveled to the capitol, they will generally try to see them. Always call first to make an appointment. To maximize your efforts, make contact with your respective senator and representative. The following are recommendations for visiting with legislators:

- **When you set up the meeting, be clear about your meeting's purpose.** Identify all meeting participants and affiliations (family members). Inform the legislator and/or their staff who will be in the room in advance of the meeting.
- **Be on time for your appointment.** But don't expect legislators to be on time; they often have hearings or meetings they cannot anticipate and cannot leave. You must be patient.
- **Practice a three-minute statement of all the information you want to present.** This will force you to think about what you want and why you want it, as well as respect the legislator's limited time.
- **Prepare materials in advance.** Make sure that you have materials that explain your principle arguments and current contact information.
- **Keep meeting participants to a minimum.** Visit your legislators in small groups (three people are optimum) and to keep your visits brief by planning to stay no more than 15 minutes.
- **Identify meeting affiliations.** You should convey the impression that these three people are representatives of many more. If each of the three people represents a different organization or group of community members, their potential voting power will maximize your advocacy impact.
- **Let the legislator know if you are one of their constituents.** If you have any family, social, business, or political ties to the legislator you are meeting with, let them know. This may serve as identification when your point of view is considered.
- **Identify your respective roles.** Let your legislators know if you are working with others on the issue, if you are active in the community, or if you are representing members of your organization, group, or community.
- **A short one-page written statement of your position should be presented to your legislators to explain what the bill does and why they should support your viewpoint.** Make sure you give a copy to the staff, preferably before the appointment.
- **Be clear about what your position is and what you would like your legislators to do.** Identify your bill by name and number. Give the legislator some key words about the bill (e.g. "This is the bill that will create more green jobs in our neighborhood"). This is helpful to legislators because they are dealing with thousands of bills and may be too embarrassed to admit they don't know what the bill is about.
- **Be courteous in dealing with your legislators and never "burn your bridges."** Never let any disagreements lead to harsh or personal remarks. If you lose your temper or prevent them from speaking, you will greatly compromise your ability to get their support. It is important not to alienate them—you may need their support on other issues. It's all about building relationships.
- **Be firm about your position.** Do not try to force your legislators into changing their minds or committing themselves when they don't want to, but it's fair to ask them how they stand on the issue.
- **Respect legislative staff's role.** If for some unforeseen reason, the legislator is unable to meet with you at the last minute and you meet with their staff, treat their staff with the same respect as you would treat the legislator. Staff members are the eyes and ears of the legislator. Build positive relationships with them, and always thank them for their time.
- **Follow up your visit with a thank-you letter.** Use it to restate your position.