

MEETING WITH A LAWMAKER

YOUTH
STAND
UP

Meeting with lawmakers can be an effective way not only to help your voice be heard but to garner support for your cause. However, a lawmaker's time is valuable. The more structured and well planned your meeting is with a lawmaker, the more likely you are to experience a favorable reaction.

Clearly identify your "ask." Lawmakers are always looking for a very clear and specific request. They are potentially reading through hundreds, if not thousands, of bills every term. The more details you can provide, the better. Are you looking for support on a bill that's been filed? Are you looking to file a bill? Would you like them to attend a local event? Would you like them to cosponsor legislation? Or are you looking for funding for a project in your district? Make sure your ask is appropriate to your elected official. (For example, do not ask a state lawmaker to support a federal piece of legislation.)

Make an appointment. You cannot expect to see a politician without an appointment. Even when you have an appointment, the politician may have to leave early to vote, attend a meeting, or go to a hearing. You will probably end up meeting with an assistant ("staffer") instead, but do not take that personally. Actually, staffers often have the "ear" of the politician on issues that they're convinced are important. Building a relationship with staffers can be just as effective.

Do not ask your lawmaker for general support on an issue.

A comment such as "Please support X topic" does not help a legislator understand what you are looking to accomplish.

MEETING WITH A LAWMAKER

YOUTH
STAND
UP

Prepare points to go over. Have a short list of items that you'd like to talk about that includes your specific "ask." If you would like support for a bill, be sure to include the bill number in your talking points. You should also include any data or evidence that backs up your ask. Because a lawmaker and/or their staffers are potentially meeting with dozens of people in a given day, you should be prepared to list these points in a printed handout. The more succinct, the better: one to two pages will suffice. You don't want to overwhelm the politician or staffer with a pile of materials.

Stay on task. You might find the conversation drifting onto other subjects. Politely try to guide it back on course.

Dress appropriately. First impressions are important. Show everyone that you want to be taken seriously. Dress like you are going to an important community or service event.

Finish your conversation by asking for a commitment. "Can we count on your support?"

Express thanks and send a thank-you note. No matter how it goes, thank the lawmaker or staffer for their time and send a thank-you note or email after your meeting. (Tip: A handwritten thank-you note sent by regular mail makes more of an impression.)

Remember: Your lawmaker works for you. Whatever the outcome of your ask, your lawmaker was still elected to represent you. You should continue to reach out to them on the issues that you care about. You never know what change may happen in the future!