

Advocating at the state level is an effective way to express your passion for or against issues within your community. Learning how to navigate a visit to your State Capitol and how to prepare for an appointment with your legislator is important for the successful delivery of your message. Use this tip sheet to learn how to plan your visit, how to prepare your message and where to obtain additional information.

Plan your Visit

Ensure a successful visit to your State Capitol. Make note of the following in advance of your visit.



There are multiple state agencies or departments in the area around your State Capitol. Your State Capitol website has a link to the directory that contains the phone numbers for each department.



Make note of the building hours and the typical daily schedule when general assembly is in session. Understand the flow and movement of legislators and plan your day accordingly. Remember to be flexible as schedules often change.



Obtain a map of your State Capitol. Learn which building is used for legislative sessions and which building is used for legislators' offices. Research the time it takes to walk between buildings.



Plan on eating in the area of your State Capitol on the day you visit. Your State Capitol website should have a list of restaurants within walking distance. Call the restaurant to inquire about business hours and possible wait times.



Make appointments. If possible, make an appointment with the legislators you would like to visit with on your trip, or their aide if the legislator is not available. (Some legislators do not take appointments for non-constituents). You can call their Capitol office, or email their legislative email, to request an appointment.



Consider attending a tour of your State Capitol prior to the day of your planned visit. Understanding the layout and the location of buildings may simplify your next visit and allow you to focus on your goal of advocating.

Prepare and Deliver your Message

Make an appointment to meet your legislator on the day of your visit. Prepare and practice your message to ensure a successful meeting and make the most of the opportunity to be heard.



Define the goal of your visit. Is there a specific bill that you are speaking to, or a general issue that is important to raise? What points do you want to make? What facts support your view?



Read and understand the bill or issue. Which legislators do you want to meet with? (Your legislator, members of a specific committee, etc.) Research the topic, the legislator(s), and their district. You need to understand where they are coming from.



Choose three points you want to make during your appointment. Write down how each point affects you personally, and how their support will affect you. Stick to the facts.



During the appointment:

- Introduce yourself, state where you are from (city, state, district)
- State up front, the reason for the visit - support or opposition of a bill, education, etc.
- Relay the three points you prepared. Be brief and non-confrontational
- Be prepared to answer questions
- Thank them for their time and promise any requested follow-up



Follow up within two business days with a written note or email. Include any promised follow up.

Additional Information-

Use the following links as you prepare to advocate at the state level.

Virginia:

<https://www.vpap.org/general-assembly/citizens-guide/>
<https://environmentvirginia.org/blogs/blog/vae/navigating-virginia-general-assembly>
https://www.jmu.edu/civic/virginia_general_assembly_guide.shtml
<https://capclass.virginiageneralassembly.gov/>

West Virginia:

<https://www.wvlegislature.gov/Educational/citizens/guide.cfm>
<https://blog.wvlegislature.gov/>

Find your legislator: https://openstates.org/find_your_legislator/

Find your Representative: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>