

Visiting your Members of Congress, or their staff, face-to-face is the most effective way to actually influence them. Individuals and groups can arrange personal meetings with Senators and Representatives either in their Washington offices, or in their local offices at various times during the year. To find out when your Senator or Representative will be in their local office, you can: call their local office, check their web site or get on their mailing list.

Whether you arrange to meet with your elected officials in Washington or their local offices, here are some rules to follow:

PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

- Plan to discuss no more than two issues. Meetings are typically scheduled to last from 15 to 45 minutes.
- If you have any supporting handouts, charts or graphics, bring them with you. Consider taking extra copies in case staff members request them.
- Find out where your legislator stands and has voted on your issue. For simply reference, several pro-life groups provide excellent scorecards.

AT THE MEETING

- Arrive about 10 minutes before the appointment time. At the least, be on time. Dress neatly and conservatively. Be courteous and respectful. Relax.
- Do not be upset if you end up meeting with the legislator's staff. They are often more knowledgeable of individual issues than the legislators themselves, and they WILL inform the legislator of your views and requests.
- Introduce yourself to the legislator or their staff members: Tell them who you are and where you live. Warm them up: Try to start by complimenting something the legislator has done recently—their vote on an issue, a bill they sponsored, etc. After a minute or two of such “small talk,” state your standpoint on the issue(s) you came to discuss. No matter how passionately you feel about the issue, do not “rant-and-rave.” Nothing diminishes your credibility more than an “in-your-face” demeanor. Tip: They know you pay their salary.
- Be ready to answer questions and discuss your points in detail.
- If the legislator disagrees with you, stand up for yourself, debate the issues, but do not become over-argumentative. Keep trying to emphasize the positives of your standpoint. Always try to end the conversation on a positive note.

AFTER THE MEETING

Always send a follow-up letter or fax thanking your legislator or staff members. Also include any additional information you may have offered to provide in support of your issue. The follow-up message is important, because it confirms your commitment to your cause and helps build a valuable relationship between you and your representative.