



Easy Read Edition

They Work For Us:

A Self-Advocate's Guide to Getting Through to your Elected Officials

Part 5: Meeting in Person

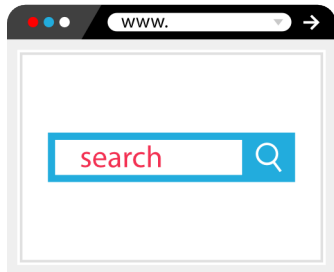


5. Meeting in person

Face-to-face meetings are very important. **Elected officials** can't ignore people who are right in front of them talking about a problem.



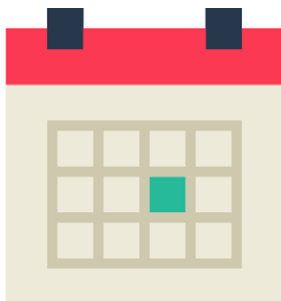
Meetings help elected officials put a “face” to a certain **bill** or **law**. Your elected official might think about you and your story when they are deciding whether to support a law. This could affect their decision about the law.



You can find out how to set up a meeting with an elected official on their website.



Some elected officials have a page on their website for setting up meetings. But, for most elected officials, you will need to call or email them.



You should plan to set up your meeting at least 2 weeks before you want to meet.

What should I expect at a meeting?

Here are some tips for what to expect at a meeting, and how you can prepare:



- Meetings are usually about 15 to 45 minutes long. Try to find out how long a meeting will be so you can plan how much to say.



- You probably won't meet with your elected official. Instead, you will meet with someone who works for your elected official. After the meeting, they will tell the elected official what you said.



- Learn everything you can about the law or problem you are talking about before the meeting. Also learn about what other people might say to argue against your opinion.



- If you have any handouts, charts or pictures that will help you explain your opinion, bring a few copies with you. You can give them to the people you're talking to and have one for yourself to look at.



- Arrive at the meeting place about 10 minutes before the appointment time.



- Try to dress nicely.

Elevator speeches



You might want to come up with an **elevator speech** before you meet with your elected official.



An elevator speech is a short speech that you have memorized in case you get a moment with an elected official. For example, riding the elevator with them.

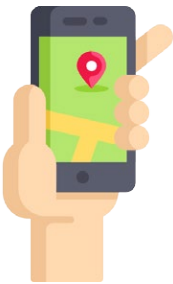


Elevator speeches help you remember your most important points. They're also good scripts to use if your meeting is very short.

Here is what you should put in an elevator speech:

HELLO
my name is

- Your first and last name



- Where you live



- Your school, workplace, or another group you belong to



- Bring up the law or problem you want to talk about. Explain what you want.



- Say *why* you and other people care about this.



- Thank the elected official for listening to you



Try to keep your elevator speech under 1 minute long. Make sure to practice your speech before your meeting.



You might want to bring a piece of paper with some information you would like to share. You can give the paper to your elected official or their staff, so they can read it and learn more later.

Example: Elevator speech

Here is an example of an elevator speech Sally might give to her **Representative**:



Hi, I'm Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown, California. I'm a member of the Stop the Bees Community Group.



I'm here today to ask you to support the Beekeeping Act. The Beekeeping Act will give money to build the bees homes away from our city.



Right now, there are too many bees everywhere. I was scared to leave my house to come here and meet you. Everyone I've talked to feels scared because of the bees.



If we pass the Beekeeping Act, we won't have to feel scared to leave our houses anymore.



Please support the Beekeeping Act to give us our safety back. Thank you for your time.

What should I do during a meeting?



- Introduce yourself to the person you are meeting with. Tell them who you are and where you live.



- Try to start by saying good things about something your elected official has done recently. This helps make the person you're talking to more open to your ideas.



- Bring up the law or problem you want to talk about. Explain what you want.



- Say *why* you and other people care about this.



- Be ready to answer questions and give the people you're talking to more information.

Other things to keep in mind:



- The person you are talking to might disagree with what you have to say. This can be frustrating.



- Remember that your goal is to get them to change their mind. So, make sure that you don't yell or make it seem like you are arguing with them. If you do this, they might not listen to what you are saying.



- Always try to end the conversation on a positive note.



- After a meeting, always send a thank-you email. This lets your elected official know that you appreciate their time. It also helps them remember what you talked about.

Example: Meeting with Representative Smith

Let's say that Sally goes to visit Representative Smith, to talk about the bee problem. Here is an example of a good meeting between Sally and Representative Smith:



Sally:

Hello, Representative Smith. My name is Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown.



Representative Smith:

Great to meet you, Sally.



Sally:

It's great to meet you as well. I want to start by telling you how much I like your bill, the Free Cereal for Everyone Act. It has helped my family have breakfast food.



Representative Smith:

Thank you. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.



Sally:

I wanted to talk with you about the Beekeeping Act. Do you know about this bill?



Representative Smith:

I have heard about it, but please remind me.



Sally:

The Beekeeping Act would put money towards building a new place where the bees can live.

I'm sure you know that there are bees all over town. This scares people. I have a list of names for you of more than 500 community members who say that they feel scared to go outside because of the bees. Last week, the bees attacked my nephew. We need to build another place for the bees to live.



Representative Smith:

I agree that it's bad when bees attack people. But the bees also give us important things, like honey. I'm not sure I can support a law that would make all the bees leave.



Sally:

Yes, honey is important. But the government is spending a lot of money right now to pay for health care for people who get stung by bees.

Building the bees a new place to live will save all that money. Then we can use that money to buy honey.



Representative Smith:

What if we build the bees a place to live, and then the bees don't want to move there?



Sally:

I have talked with many expert beekeepers. They told me that if we build the bees homes, the bees will definitely use them. Here is a letter from the beekeepers that explains what they have to say.



Representative Smith:

Hmm. That is a good point. I will think more about this.



Sally:

Thank you for your time today. Please consider supporting the Beekeeping Act.

Glossary



bill

A bill is an idea for a law. It is not yet a law and it can be changed. Congress votes on bills. Then, those bills become laws.



elected officials

Politicians that we elect to the government are our elected officials. Elected officials listen to the problems that people have. Then, they make laws to fix these problems.



laws

Laws are rules the government makes that everyone has to follow.



Representatives

Representatives are the elected officials in the House of Representatives.

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