



Children's Action Alliance

A Voice for Arizona's Children since 1988

Meet with Your Elected Officials in Their Offices or in the Community

Most members of Congress, state legislators, the Arizona Governor, city council members and other officials will hold constituent meetings in their communities. This is a good way to introduce yourself and learn more about the issues without having the intensity of a one-on-one meeting in an office (and also probably less rushed). Community meetings are also good ways to stay informed about the progress of on-going issues and to meet other voters in your district.

Your first step is to visit the web pages of your respective elected leaders and sign up on their e-mail lists for community announcements. If they don't have an e-mail list, call their office to see if they host regular events. If s/he doesn't and you're feeling enthusiastic, you can volunteer to host one in your home or local coffee shop.

With increasingly busy schedules, it's becoming more difficult to find time to meet personally with your state or federal officials but that doesn't mean you shouldn't try. You may want to organize a small group of constituents to meet instead of asking for a one-on-one or ask an advocacy or community group to help you get a meeting.

If you do get a personal meeting with your elected official, follow these guidelines:

Before the Meeting

If you want to discuss a particular piece of legislation, have the bill number available. Develop an agenda or talking points for the meeting. Decide on the key talking points for the meeting and determine the order in which you'd like to present your information. If you attend the meeting as a group, designate one or two people who will "lead" the conversation. This will help keep your message and the presentation of information clear and organized. Ensure that everyone in the group supports and will deliver the same message.

At the Meeting

Prepare to answer questions on the point(s) you address. If your elected official asks you questions to which you don't have the answers, simply say you will look into the issue and reply back right away. This also gives you another opportunity to contact the office.

Provide informational documents that support your position. Leave a fact sheet or other materials that reinforce your position and the action(s) you would like to see taken.

Ask the elected official where she/he stands on the issue you are discussing. Ask the elected official if you can count on his/her support on the issue(s) you discussed. If your elected official or their staff disagrees or is noncommittal, don't threaten or argue with her/him because it is counterproductive. Try to find common ground or areas of compromise. Talk about the value of your issue to your personally or to the district.

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If you can't find common ground or get your elected official on board, you may want to schedule another meeting with different constituents to show broad support for your position or sending a packet of letters from constituents. If the elected official is unfamiliar with the legislation/issue, ask her/him to review the materials you are leaving behind and say that you will follow-up in two weeks for their response.

Verify follow-up information. Confirm proper contact information for the person with whom you should follow up.

Following the Visit

Send a "thank you" for the opportunity to meet. Write a thank you letter to the elected official for taking time to meet with you and listening to your concerns. Enclose any documentation you had agreed to provide to bolster your position and briefly restate your views and what you would like him/her to do.

Follow your elected official's position and actions on the issue. Monitor how the elected official votes and send him/her your thoughts on their position. If the elected official votes with your position on the issue, recognize that vote with a written "thank you." If the elected official votes against your position, write or call to express your disappointment and urge reconsideration of the issue the next time it comes up for a vote.

As always, Children's Action Alliance is glad to help. If you would like contact information, ideas or suggestions, or just to talk with someone about a planned meeting, call us at (602) 266-0707.