



Advocacy Toolkit

2009

Conducting Visits With Members of Congress

Being an effective child advocate requires building strong relationships with our members of Congress and their staff members. It is important to use every opportunity to reach out and maintain these relationships. Meeting with your members and letting them know what policies are important to you, your school, and community is an important step in building this relationship.

You can meet with your members of Congress either in their Washington, D.C. office or their district office. You should be aware that most congressional meetings are taken by one of their staff members, who then relay pertinent information onto the members of Congress. Below are some tips on how to schedule and meet with your elected officials.

Scheduling Hill Visits

You can schedule individual or group visits with your member of Congress. Out of professional courtesy, most members will not meet with constituents from other states or districts, so only schedule meetings with your own member. To find your member's contact information, please visit the PTA Take Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/npta2/home/>.

When you call the Congressional office, ask for the scheduler if you are requesting a meeting with the member of Congress or, if you wish to meet with a legislative aid (LA), ask to be transferred to the LA handling the issue you wish to discuss. Try to request a meeting between 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Identify who you are, who you represent, and who will attend. Indicate what you want to discuss with the member or his or her staff. Different offices will respond more quickly than others. If you are scheduling multiple visits in one day, take special consideration when traveling from the House to the Senate or vice versa, which is a 15 minute walk. The day before the appointment, call to confirm.

Do Your Research

Learn about your member of Congress, his/her priority issues, and the committee(s) on which he or she serves. Bring local statistics and facts about your state PTA's influence on the issue that you will be discussing during your meeting. You should become familiar with National PTA's public policy priorities, which can be found in the **PTA Public Policy Agenda** at http://www.pta.org/public_policy_agenda.asp, which includes research, statistics and rationale



supporting its recommendations. Know how the official's support has helped in the past on these issues, or could help in the future. A simple internet search can provide you with information on your member's position, priorities, and voting record.

Arrive early

Arrive 5 minutes early, and be patient if the member is running late or gets called away during the meeting. When Congress is in session, elected officials and their staff have an extremely busy schedule and it is not uncommon for meetings to be interrupted. If this occurs, continue your meeting with staff and leave behind information about your local programs and PTA's public policy agenda. If you happen to be running late, please call the Congressional office and let them know.

State the Purpose of Your Visit

After the initial hand shakes and introductions, tell the member of Congress that you are a member of National PTA, who you're with (state, local unit and school), what you want to talk about, and why. When advocating for a specific bill, know the title, number, and status of the bill. In a direct and polite manner, tell your member of Congress what action you would like to be taken on the bill. Remember to be brief and to the point. The entire visit should not take longer than 30 minutes.

Make it Local

All politics are local. Be sure to connect the issues you are discussing to what's happening in the member of Congress' state and district. Give local statistics, facts and success stories to back your point. Explain how your community and the policymaker's constituents are affected and how PTA addresses these issues.

Listen, Respond, and Don't Argue

Listen carefully to what your member of Congress or their staffer has to say and allow them to state their opinion and position on the issue. If the elected official does not agree with your position, don't argue or make a future enemy. Simply identify issues of concern or differences of opinion and respond based on your knowledge and experience. Remember you are trying to build a relationship, so don't alienate someone who may be your future supporter. If you don't know the answer to a particular question, just say so and promise to get back to them with an answer. National PTA's Office of Public Policy can offer support, if needed.

Wrap-up the Meeting

Summarize your key points and positions. Give the member of Congress supportive information, fact sheets, and your contact information. Thank the elected official for their time and leave promptly.

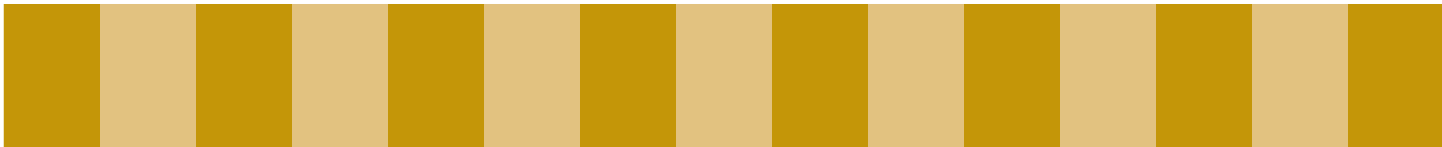


Follow Up

Be sure to send a thank you letter to the member of Congress and their staff. Remember that you want to develop and maintain a relationship with your elected official and their staff—so stay in contact, send periodic information and updates, invite them to visit your school or program, and thank them for future votes in favor of your position.

Fill Out a Hill Visit Report Form

Let National PTA know how your visit went and where your member of Congress stood on the issues you discussed. Please complete and send us a **Hill Visit Report Form** at http://www.pta.org/2009_Congressional_Visit_Report_Form.doc, and return it to PTA's Public Policy staff at 1400 L Street, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20005, or e-mail us at khaars@pta.org. This gives PTA staff in Washington additional insight into the positions of members of Congress and helps us identify strong supporters and those that need additional attention or information, as well as PTA members who have good relationships that can be called upon in the future.



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