

Meeting With Your Legislators

- **Pick up the phone.** Introduce yourself as a constituent, and a member of a local group/s, and say you'd like to schedule a meeting with their office on an issue.
- **Include others.** It helps to present a broad, unified front on an issue. Consider inviting 2-3 people of different backgrounds to join you. But remember: inform the office they're coming.
- **Prepare.** Research the official's voting record, proposed bills, and even personal details such as schooling, family, and other interests.
- **Make a folder.** You want to leave something behind for the aide to read. Include a printout, flyer, your business card, and/or something similar.
- **Arrive early.** Aides have tight schedules. Show up at least 5-10 minutes early. Use the spare time to go over the points you want to make.
- **Make your case.** Introduce yourself, the groups you work/volunteer for, and take a couple minutes to explain why you wanted to have a meeting.
- **Ask questions.** Including, but not limited to: what is your view on a certain piece of legislation? Or, what is your current legislative agenda?
- **Stay calm!** The aide will likely have questions. Remain patient and polite. This isn't a debate: you want to form a good relationship.
- **Admit when you don't know something.** Just say you will follow up.
- **Close with a pitch.** Keep it realistic and pragmatic, such as considering your views at the next vote, speaking out on an issue, or proposing a bill.
- **Keep in touch.** Ask for a business card when you leave and follow up in 1-2 days. And don't be a stranger! But also, don't be a pest.



Calling Your Legislators

- **Think: do I need to make a call?** Timeliness is especially important when you are phoning. Phone calls are best for imminent votes or other timely political issues. Email works better for broader issues.
 - As of 2016 it is best practice that calling rather than emailing your legislator is the most effective thing to do. Great New York Times article explaining why: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/22/us/politics/heres-why-you-should-call-not-email-your-legislators.html>
- **Pick up the phone.** To find the contact information for your state or federal legislator, visit <https://hq.salsalabs.com/dia/api/getLocal.jsp>
- **Let them know that you are a constituent.** Elected officials are most interested in your opinions if you are a voter in the district or state he or she represents. Make clear that you are a constituent; even better, stress any of your local community activity (e.g., if you serve on a school board or PTA).
- **Ask for an aide who handles the issue about which you are calling.** Ask to speak with the person in the office who handles the issue about which you are calling (e.g., health care, church-state), if possible. However, keep in mind some offices have few aides, or else their aides are extremely busy. If you cannot speak with the aide, let the receptionist know your reason for calling and your views on the issue.
- **Know your facts.** You should be able to accurately describe the topic about which you are calling and state your opinion on what your legislator should do. Feel free to write a basic outline with this information in advance of the call.
- **Note any expertise.** If you have professional or academic qualifications with the issue in question be sure to mention it. It will help to establish your credibility on the issue and may even prompt the aide to ask you for guidance on the issue.
- **Be brief.** Aides receive many phone calls every day, so keep your call short. Make your point and say thank you.



Emailing Your Legislators

- **Find their email address.** Most often you will send your email through a contact form, but some legislators list email addresses online. To try and find the direct email address for your legislator, visit <https://hq.salsalabs.com/dia/api/getLocal.jsp>
 - Michigan House List: <http://house.michigan.gov/MHRPublic/frmRepList.aspx?all=true>
 - Michigan Senate List: http://senate.michigan.gov/senatorinfo_list.html
- **Let them know that you are a constituent.** Elected officials are most interested in your opinions if you are a voter in the district or state he or she represents. Make clear that you are a constituent; even better, stress any of your local community activity (e.g., if you serve on a school board or PTA).
- **Make clear why you are emailing the office.** Aides are most likely to read your email if it begins with a clear statement regarding who you are (a concerned constituent) and why you are emailing their office (e.g, you are concerned regarding an issue in your district or a bill moving through the statehouse).
- **Keep it short, simple, and straightforward.** Legislative offices receive a large number of email messages. The more you can do to keep your message brief and on-point, the better. Aim for a concise statement rather than an essay. Typically 1-3 paragraphs are enough to introduce yourself and state your concerns.
- **Note any expertise.** If you have professional or academic qualifications regarding the issue in question, be sure to mention it. It will help to establish your credibility on the issue and may even prompt the aide to ask you for guidance on the issue.
- **Close with a specific request.** Keep it realistic and pragmatic: ask the member to consider your views on their next vote or speech; urge them to oppose, support, and/or speak out on an issue or bill; or even ask them to propose legislation.