

ZEROTOFIVE
MONTANA

LEGISLATIVE VISIT

Tools & Tips

Your legislators are elected to represent you. As their constituent, your legislators need to hear from you to ensure the decisions they make reflect the needs of you and your community. Making decisions regarding your child's health and well-being is too crucial to delegate to anyone else. Make use of your power; your voice is important! This document will assist you in preparing for your legislative visit, offering general advice for before, during, and after your time there.

PHASE 1: PREPARING FOR A LEGISLATIVE VISIT

STEP 1. FIND OUT WHO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS ARE

Follow this link <https://bit.ly/findmylegMT> or scan the QR code.



STEP 2. LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR LEGISLATOR

- Know which committees your legislators serve on.
- How have they voted on the issues that matter to you?
- What are their particular areas of interest?

STEP 3. PLAN AHEAD/ KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO ADDRESS

You should know what you want to convey to your legislator to ensure that your meeting with them is as productive as possible. What is your visit's purpose?

- Do you just want to get to know your legislator better?
- Are you providing background information regarding a topic?
- Are you requesting your legislator support or oppose a specific bill?
- Do you have a proposal you would like your legislator to consider?

Decide what you want to say after deciding what your primary objective is for your visit. Start with three important points and proceed from there. Make notecards so you can refer to them during your visit.

STEP 4. CALL AHEAD

- When you call your legislator's office, you may reach the legislator or it may go to their voicemail.
- Identify yourself as a constituent in their district and what you would like to talk about.
- Ask if there is good time to meet or propose a time/day to meet.

TIPS FOR YOUR VISIT

- At the Capitol, you should dress professionally (for example, dress pants, a button-down shirt, or dress shoes).
- Even if your meeting is not in the Capitol, business attire is still recommended.
- Rehearse! It's easy to get overwhelmed and lose track of what you want to say.
- A notecard with your talking points written on it can be helpful for reference during the conversation.
- Create a fact sheet to serve as a reminder to your legislator of what you discussed and your position on the issue. Making a one-page fact sheet to give to them is an easy way to accomplish this.
- Avoid jargon and business lingo. In both the fact sheet and during your visit, use simple language.
- If you're going with a group, plan ahead and identify one person as the point of contact.

PHASE 2: DURING THE VISIT

STEP 1. INTRODUCE YOURSELF AS A CONSTITUENT

- Who you are
- Where you are from

STEP 2. STATE WHY YOU ARE THERE

- Clearly communicate your three key points early in the conversation.
- Be brief and concise, legislators are busy.

STEP 3. ASK FOR A COMMITMENT

This will look different depending on the purpose of your visit.

The commitment might be for a follow-up meeting if you are there to introduce yourself. If you want to talk about a specific issue, ask your legislator to explain their position on it.

For example, you might ask if they support funding for public Pre-K education. Other times you may be asking your legislator to vote for or against a specific bill or to sign on as a co-sponsor.

STEP 4. ASK HOW YOU CAN BE OF ASSISTANCE

Even if your legislator supports your issue, they may need help convincing their colleagues to take the same position. By offering your support, you're showing commitment to the issues which deepens the relationship with your legislator.

STEP 5. THANK YOUR LEGISLATOR FOR THEIR TIME

This is a small gesture that goes a long way.

TIPS DURING YOUR VISIT

DO

- Share a personal story that connects to the larger problem or issue.
- Address them appropriately, for example Representative _____ or Senator _____.
- Be yourself: sincerity, honesty and a strong belief in the what you are advocating for will come across loud and clear.
- If you don't know something, say so and follow up after your visit.

DON'T

- Don't use technical terms or acronyms.
- Don't attack your legislator or his/her record on your issue.
- Don't threaten your legislator by saying things like "I'll never vote for you again unless...."
- Don't assume your legislator is an expert on what your are discussing.

PHASE 3: ADVOCACY AFTER THE VISIT

SEND A THANK YOU CARD

This is a chance to confirm any commitments made by your legislator during your meeting and provide necessary information for follow-up.

MAINTAIN COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

Write letters, call, and/or arrange another visit so that your issue stays at the forefront of your legislator's mind.

PLAN ADDITIONAL ADVOCACY ON YOUR ISSUE

In addition to legislative visits, there are many ways to advocate on the issues that matter most to you and your family. Learn about other ways to advocate by visiting www.zerotofive.org.

GENERAL TIPS FOR BEING AN ADVOCATE

BEING AN "EXPERT" IS NOT REQUIRED

A person who is sincere and dedicated to the cause and who believes in the cause they are advocating for is the most effective advocate. You are a credible and effective spokesperson due to your knowledge of children's issues and your interest in them.

KNOW YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL AND THEIR CONTACT INFO

Between federal, state and local level representatives, keeping track of who represents you can be difficult.

- Identify your state senator, state representative, and federal representatives, visit <https://bit.ly/findmylegMT>
- Contact the Office of Public Instruction, visit <https://opi.mt.gov/>.
- Visit your school district website to find your local school board members.

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

In order for your representatives to represent you well, they need to know what you care about. Communicate through letters, emails, phone calls, and in-person meetings.

GET INVOLVED IN THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS EARLY

It's always easier to change a bill or stop something from moving on if you get involved earlier rather than later.

NETWORK WITH OTHERS

Connect with others that care about the same issues you do! There are many different ways to do this. For example, you could connect through social media or by taking a training course.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Montana State Legislature <https://www.leg.mt.gov/>

"Montana State Legislature 101" (document)

http://montanapartnershiptoendchildhoodhunger.org/images/MT_State_Legislature_101.pdf

"[Early Childhood Advocacy Toolkit](#)", Ounce of Prevention

"Become an Advocate", National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

<https://www.naeyc.org/get-involved/advocate>

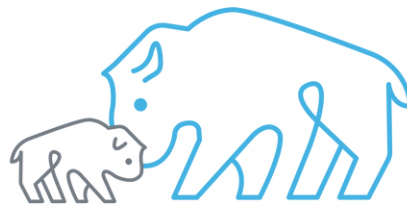
"Take Back Your Government: A Citizen's Guide to Grassroots Advocacy", Colorado State Senator Morgan Carroll (book)

<https://www.amazon.com/Take-Back-your-Government-Grassroots/dp/1555914454>

This document was made with resources from:

Colorado Children's Campaign. 2022. 2022 Speak Up Advanced Advocacy Toolkit. [online] Available at: <<https://www.coloradokids.org/advocacy/network-resources/2022-speak-up-advanced-advocacy-toolkit/>> [Accessed 30 September 2022].

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