



1623 Connecticut Avenue NW; Suite 300
Washington, DC 20009
Phone: (202) 293-4414
Fax: (202) 293-8344
Web: www.SchoolsNotPrisons.com
Blog: www.DAREgeneration.com

Guide to Lobbying Members of Congress

Set up a meeting.

- Find out who your representative and senators are by going to <http://www.congress.org>.
- Call the member of Congress's local office (or DC office, if you plan to be there). This information can easily be found on the members' websites.
- Identify yourself as a constituent by saying where you live.
- Ask to set up a meeting with the member. If the member is unavailable to meet, often a staff person will offer to meet with you. If this is the case, ask specifically to meet with "the aide who handles [your issue] legislation." (In the case of the HEA Aid Elimination Penalty, this is likely the education aide.) If you plan to go as a group, be prepared to name each person who will be attending.

Be prepared.

- Come to the meeting with specific talking points to discuss.
- If you are in a group, make sure that you have already discussed which issues should be raised and that you are all in agreement on how best to articulate your position.
- Rehearse responses to potential questions or concerns that might be raised regarding your position.

Be professional.

- Dress professionally. You don't need to wear a three-piece suit, but you should dress as you would for a job interview.
- It should go without saying that you should not be late, but keep in mind that this is not just to be polite. Members and their staffers work at a frantic pace with extremely tight schedules. The members themselves often have nearly every minute of their day scheduled.
- Always address and refer to members as "Senator" or "Congressman/Congresswoman."

Be courteous.

- Though you should explain your issue in detail as if they know nothing about it, it's polite to introduce information with phrases like "as you may know..."
- Even if you disagree with a given member's politics, it's not helpful to demonstrate this when trying to persuade him or her on a particular issue.
- It is often helpful to begin a meeting with a brief word of thanks for something the member has done, like "Before we start I just wanted to thank you for your great work on saving the spotted owl," "building the highway," or any other reason you can find to give praise.

- When responding to a member's concerns, do not be argumentative or confrontational. If appropriate, politely address the question by adding information or offering another angle on your position.
- When you're asked a question that you don't have the answer to, don't guess or try to make something up on the spot. Rather, use this as an opportunity to follow-up after the meeting. You might say, "I'm not sure about that, but I can get back to you."

Be specific.

- In your discussion with the member or aid, try to demonstrate a connection between your issue and the interests of his or her constituents. Members want to represent the best interests of their districts and states and are more likely to be responsive if they can see how your issue directly impacts a significant portion of their constituency.
- Make sure to make a specific request (e.g. co-sponsor/oppose/introduce/repeal H.R./S. ____). Even if you are unable to refer to a bill number or law, be sure to make a very specific and limited request so that the member knows exactly how to address your concerns.

Leave materials.

- Whenever possible, bring clear and concise background materials to support your case. These could include statistics, news clippings, op-eds, letters or statements from prominent organizations or individuals, and, of course, SSDP advocacy materials. See <http://www.SchoolsNotPrisons.com> for advocacy materials, and check with staff in the SSDP National Headquarters for additional materials.
- Leave your name and contact information, or business card if you have one.

Follow up.

- Make sure to get a business card from the staffer handling your issue before you leave.
- Offer to keep in touch on the issue, and offer yourself as a resource if the staffer should need more information in the future.
- No more than one week following the meeting, write a brief thank-you e-mail to the member and/or staffer you met with, mentioning the date and subject of your meeting.
- Inform SSDP's National Headquarters of the results of your meeting. Doing so allows us do a better job of targeting our own lobbying efforts in Washington, DC and allows us to tailor our message to the individual concerns of a given member of Congress.

For assistance in preparing for a congressional meeting or to report the results of your meeting, please contact SSDP's Government Relations Director, Tom Angell, by e-mail at tom@ssdp.org or by phone at 202.293.4414.