

How to Hold Meetings with Elected Officials

Requesting a Visit

- You MUST be a constituent, or someone requesting the appointment on behalf of the constituent. If calling as a Zonta member, mention your club's location and say how many constituents will attend.
- Have a clear agenda: just one issue or a couple of specific bills related to that issue.
- Either call the office and request the scheduler's email address or fill out a request for a meeting online; follow up with a call to the office. Ask for the scheduler/say why you want the meeting and ask whom to talk to or email.
- Add www.zonta.org or "www.zontafairfax.com" to your signature on every email. This allows the official to prepare themselves for you if they wish.
- Follow-up, follow-up, follow-up.

Getting Ready for the Visit

- Research the official's voting record and in particular their stance on the bills you wish to discuss. Know if they are on any committee that is considering the bill.
- Understand your issue and the arguments for and against the action for which you are advocating.
- Have talking points. Be prepared to share them in a leave-behind package, along with information about Zonta.
- **Make a clear ask!** Do you want them to vote for or against a bill? Co-sponsor one? Sign a pledge?
- Decide on who in the group will present the talking points. If a large group just assign one or two people to talk with the others able to add occasional comments if appropriate. Decide who will make the ask.
- Bring materials: about the issue and about Zonta International and your club.
- Alert the media. Local media may be interested in covering the event if you are a large group.

Tips

- Don't discount the staffers. They are frequently the source of the official's information. Get them on your side.
- You don't have to go to Washington DC to see congressmen. Request a meeting in the home state when Congress is in recess. These times are "district work weeks." Congress posts its calendar for the year Jan-Dec within-session and out-of-session times noted.
- Take pictures outside the office or building. Ask for one with the official. Post them on social media.
- Use personal stories to enhance your talking points if possible.
- Listen carefully for direct or indirect statements of support or opposition.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say you'll find out and follow-up.

After the Visit

- Right after the meeting, compare notes with your group to confirm what the elected official agreed to do.
- Send a personal thank-you letter to the official and remind them of what they agreed to do.
- Follow up in a timely manner with any information you promised.
- Share the results of the visit with your club, your District Advocacy Chair and your ZI Advocacy Committee members.

Just Dropping By

- Prepare as you would for an appointment. Sometimes you will get the chance to meet on the fly--especially if the official is not yet decided or staff wants to hear your arguments to add to their knowledge base or buttress their own.
- Identify yourself as a member of the local Zonta club and a constituent.
- Ask to speak to the staffer who handles the issue you want to discuss or another staffer who is free to have an impromptu meeting.
- Leave a copy of your materials with the staffer or if no one is available, leave them with a note. Include your contact information.
- Share the results of your visit with your club, your District Advocacy Chair and ZI Advocacy Committee members.

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