

Step-by-Step Guide to: Meeting with Your Legislators

(Courtesy of Lisa Plymate, an internist in Seattle and our Washington State Director)

1. Pick the legislator(s) who would be the highest yield to visit. Unless your legislator is in town, you will probably be meeting with a staffer.
2. E-mail people in your network (friends, colleagues, med school classmates) to select the best day to have a meeting. Start your e-mail with the reasons for the visit and let them know its importance. DFA also maintains a list of members in your area. Write a 'blast' email to send out these members and then email it to Alice Chen (atychen@gmail.com) and Megan Smith (megan.smith@drsforamerica.org) who will send it out.
3. Contact your legislator(s) office to set up a time for the meeting. Let the receptionist know the nature of your meeting - your goals for the visit, anticipated number of people, makeup of the group.
4. Notify your group of the selected date. Re-invite entire group, individually contacting those who already expressed interest. Email Alice and Megan to invite other members in your state and to get the latest handout. Request RSVPs. As you get closer to date, remind, remind, remind!
5. Discuss topics to be covered, and who will ask questions. The purpose of the visit is bidirectional. You want to deliver your message, and you want to gain an insider's feel about where the legislation is going. You may well be learning of aspects you did not know about. Discussion should start well before visit, to give everyone a chance to gather their thoughts and participate. You may want to meet before the visit, perhaps simply at or near the site of the office, about an hour beforehand. You will definitely get more out of this visit if you go prepared.
6. During meeting, always be polite. Start with thank you's where you agree with actions. You may express disappointment, or urge action in a different direction. Tell your story and stories of patients you've seen. Appeal to the reason legislators went into politics – to serve people. Emphasize the importance of passing information along. Request a response from legislator. Let them know you and your constituency support them if they proceed. Offer your help in getting ideas across.
7. Assign someone to summarize and send a thank you from group. The note may remind the staffer of main points you wished to make in meeting, or any follow-up. Let rest of your team who could not attend know of outcome. And let Doctors for America know, too!



Enjoy, learn, and feel empowered! You CAN make a difference. Visits 'count' more than letters, e-mails, or calls.



Stories from the Field

“We have a senator on the crucial Finance Committee. At a time when we felt she was unclear where she stood on a public option, six physicians from DFA went together to talk to her staffer. Shortly after this visit, she came out with a new strong statement in support of a public option.”

-- Lisa Plymate (Seattle, Washington)

“Four of us met with Senator Bennet’s Community Liason in his downtown office. We thanked her for his exceptional leadership on the matter of health reform. He was one of 29 senators this past week who added their name to a strongly worded letter to Senator Reid and other Senate leaders in support of a public option in legislation that comes to the Senate Floor for a vote soon.”

-- Lila Rosenthal (Boulder, Colorado)

“We had a meeting with our legislator with 20 physician leaders in Pittsburgh and discussed why he opposed health reform. We expressed our concerns and asked for his support for health reform. He used to be a Blue Dog Democrat. No more – he is fully on Board.”

-- Brahma Sharma (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)