

How to Lobby

Meeting With Your Member of Congress

Meeting with members of Congress, or their staff, is an important way to educate them about the issues that are important to LGBT people. Preparation can help to ensure a successful and smooth visit with members of Congress. Here are some things to consider.

- When you arrive, each team member should introduce themselves. Say your name and that you are a constituent, a veteran, a parent or anything else that might be important to the legislator. Note if you have a connection with your representative.
- You may wish to bring a business card with your contact information.
- It is very important to arrive on time. If you are late, you are likely to miss your appointment entirely. Plan plenty of time to travel to the office just in case an emergency arises.
- Always be brief and stay on point — your meeting time will be very limited, usually 15 to 20 minutes. This is when your team's preparation pays off. Having your general talking points written and assigned will help you present your information clearly and directly.

Meeting with Staff Instead of a Member

- If your member of Congress is not available to meet with you, you may be asked to meet with a staff person. This is not a negative thing. Legislators rely a great deal on their staffs and receive detailed reports on every visit with constituents. So, while meeting with the actual member of Congress is ideal, meeting with staff people is also extremely helpful. If you found the staff to be helpful, write to your congressperson to let him or her know that you appreciated the staff's courtesy. Also, keep in mind that occasionally something unforeseen comes up and, even if you were expecting to meet with the actual legislator, you may see a staffer instead.
- Often meeting with a staff member first, or even several times, can help you get in to see the actual member of Congress in the future. Remember that staff members can be very important in shaping legislation and policy, so do meet with them.
- Each visitor should send a thank-you note immediately — this is a quick and easy way to further your relationship with your congressperson. If you also met with someone on the congressperson's staff, write them a separate thank you note as well. Be sure to follow up as soon as possible with any promised additional information.

Introductions

- Sample Introduction:
Good afternoon, Senator O'Brien. My name is Patsy Anderson, and I am a life-long resident of our state, as you are. I am a transgender woman and the founder of Feminine Spirits, our local advocacy and support group for transgender women. I very much appreciate this opportunity to talk with you about some important issues for our community.

- **Sample Introduction:**

Hello, Congresswoman Martinez. My name is Joe Gardner, I'm a new resident of our state, and a member of my local Union. I lost my last job when my employer found out that I am a female-to-male transgender man. I want to thank you for your consistent support of LGBT people and the legislation that is important to us.

Content

- When speaking with your congressperson, the most important thing is to talk about personal experiences of discrimination or people you know. Refer to local examples of discrimination and violence — personal accounts are the most likely to affect your congressperson.
- Painting the realities that the LGBT community faces is essential for gaining the support of our representatives. However, it is critical to keep your remarks brief and to the point.
- Stay focused so you will be understood and make your point well. A short, articulate statement will be far more effective than an elaborate story. Congresspeople have limited time and many issues to focus on — help them by being as clear as you can be.
- Avoid theoretical discussions — they are not a productive way to communicate with your congressperson and are only likely to cause frustration. For example, engaging in a complicated analysis of gender theory will not be helpful unless he or she specifically asks for this. Instead, focus on telling your personal account and asking your member of Congress to support specific changes in policy.
- Share only appropriate information in the meeting. Be sensitive to the fact that some people are uncomfortable hearing about the body and may not want to know specifics. It is better to talk about the impact of discrimination on an individual. In some segments of our society, it is considered rude and inappropriate to discuss the specifics of any kind of surgery; therefore, it is best to refer to surgery only in the most general terms, if at all. Most members of Congress do not have any medical training and discussing medical conditions with them can be confusing.
- Speak slowly and clearly, without using jargon, slang, acronyms, abbreviations or terms that other people may not know or find offensive. Use “transgender” rather than “TG” and “cross dresser” instead of “CD” or “transvestite.” Do not assume that people will understand terms like MTF, FTM or “transition.” Many people speak too quickly if they are nervous, so pay attention to how you are talking so that you will be sure you are being understood.
- Speak positively and do not disparage other people or their positions, even if you don't agree with them. Make your own position clear and let it speak for itself.
- Listen carefully to what your congressperson has to say and clearly and succinctly answer any questions she or he asks.
- If you do not know something, do not make it up. Explain that you do not know the answer and offer to follow up with the information. If you do offer this, make sure you really do follow up.
- In addition to educating the legislator on LGBT issues, it is important that you leave knowing whether the legislator would be supportive of trans-inclusive legislation. When you are about 75 percent through the allotted time and have given your basic presentation, it is time to get a better idea of your congressperson's thoughts if she or he has not made them clear to you already.

Passing an inclusive Employment Non-Discrimination Act: An Advocate's Toolkit

- Consider asking the following questions, in your own words, to determine where your legislator stands:
 - Is there anything else that you need to know to help you to better understand the issues faced by LGBT people?
 - Would you co-sponsor legislation that includes protections based on gender identity and expression?
 - If you will not co-sponsor trans-inclusive legislation, would you be willing to vote for or support such legislation?
- It can be helpful to leave information behind for the member of Congress and his or her staff to consider later. However, resist the urge to leave a large packet of information — legislators and staff simply will not have time to read it. A one-page leave behind that covers the important facts is perfectly adequate.

Telling Your Story: An Example

My name is Jordan and I'd like to tell you a bit about myself. Ever since I was a little kid, I've been uncomfortable having to identify as either male or female. My parents tried to push me into one box or the other at first, but then they realized that this is who I am and supported me. School was okay until high school, when things got pretty rough. I almost dropped out after getting beaten up a couple of times on my way home from school by kids who called me a queer. I had some great teachers, though, who really encouraged me to stay in school. Now I'm attending college in our state at Springfield University and I've found that to be a great experience. There is a great resource center for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. As I prepare to graduate from college I am concerned about being able to find employment, which is why I am asking you to support legislation that prevents discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Final Tips

- Remember that most appointments are brief — about 15 to 20 minutes. Leave gracefully when your time is up and be careful not to overstay your welcome. If you are invited to stay longer, by all means do so if you have the time.
- Be sure to thank everyone who has been in the meeting for their time.