

10 TIPS FOR MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

Preparing for a meeting with your legislator can be intimidating, but with these helpful tips it doesn't have to be!

- 1. Get to know your legislator.** Review your legislator's biography, committee assignments, and legislative priorities. This information can usually be found on the legislator's website but can also be found online (on sites like openstates.org) and in local newspapers.
- 2. Gather the facts to show that your advocacy goal is relevant.** Before you set the agenda for the meeting, gather the facts you need on criminal justice reform so that you can build a compelling case that will move your legislator to take action.
- 3. Set and confirm the time and place.** Reach out to your legislator's scheduler to set a meeting and then confirm the appointment closer to the date. If you are going with a group, plan to walk into the meeting together. You should also decide each person's role in the meeting. Who will be the lead speaker? Who is responsible for taking notes? Who is leaving behind relevant materials?
- 4. Use good etiquette.** Each attendee should introduce themselves and mention whether they are a constituent of the legislator. The leader should mention any family, social, business, or political ties to the legislator.
- 5. Prepare your pitch.** After thanking the legislator for meeting with you, state clearly and concisely the issue that you want to discuss, the scale of the problem, your position and your personal connection to the issue, and the action you want the legislator to take.
- 6. Include your story.** Stories grab us, they help connect us to others, and they help speakers draw their audiences in. The human brain does a much better job retaining a story than data points because stories activate the brain's empathetic response. Don't just recite the facts of the issue. Share why it matters to you. If you can impact the legislator emotionally, there is a good chance you can get him or her to take action.
- 7. Be brief.** Legislators are busy, so be prepared to be brief. Come ready with 1-, 5-, and 10-minute versions of your pitch.
- 8. Be clear.** After you make your pitch, allow the legislator to respond. Ask a direct and low-commitment question to which the legislator can respond "yes." Such as, "Can we count on you to support our efforts on sentencing reform?"
- 9. Wrap up the meeting well.** Always thank the legislator or staffer for their time at the end of the meeting, even if they did not agree with your position. Collect business cards from staffers who attended the meeting. Leave an informational packet and your contact information.
- 10. Follow up.** Always follow up with an email thanking the legislator or staffer for the meeting, reiterating your key points and any commitments the legislator made with you. Include all follow-up information you promised to provide.

Note: Don't be discouraged if your meeting is with a staffer instead of the legislator. Staffers are assigned legislative issues, and serve as the subject-matter experts for their legislator. While staffers are typically in their 20s, they can strongly influence their boss's final decision on an issue. Meeting with staff is still valuable!