

# In-District Legislator Visit Packet

You don't need to travel to Washington, DC, or even to your state capital to get involved. Reaching out to your public officials, visiting their district offices, or just sending a letter can be effective. It's easy. You can influence MS issues, while staying close to home. Use the following tips and template materials to help. If you need additional information or support, feel free to contact your local National MS Society chapter at [www.nationalMSSociety.org/chapter](http://www.nationalMSSociety.org/chapter).

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# The Basics

**Reasons to reach out to your legislators.** As their constituent, your public officials want to hear from you. Scheduling a visit in their local office is an easy first step. Use the meeting to introduce yourself as someone living in their district. Share your story and talk about issues that are impacting you. It can be casual and brief. Then you can start to build an individual relationship with your legislators and key decision makers. By simply reaching out, you can advance MS issues.

**Ideal times to visit.** You can (and should) communicate with your federal, state, or community officials at any time through their district office. Many state legislators hold regular office hours, inviting their constituents to stop by. During a recess or work period, federal and state legislators often host town halls or listening sessions in their districts. Feel free to stand up and ask question. If the legislator is not available in the office, speaking with staff at any time can be just as effective.

**Calling to schedule a visit.** We recommend scheduling an in-person meeting with the legislator in the office. Be sure to call and schedule your meeting in advance, as offices are not always fully staffed. It is best set up the meeting at least two to three weeks prior to when you'd like to visit. [See tips and sample scheduling call script below.](#)

**When you visit.** Be prepared. Practice what you want to say beforehand. Remember to bring a camera and take photos, even if you are meeting with staff. [Review additional tips below.](#)

**Share your personal story.** The best way to start a conversation with your public official is to simply share your story. You are the expert on your story and how issues impact your life. But if you don't know the answer to a question, it's OK to follow up later. [See tips below on starting a conversation and sharing your personal story.](#)

**When you leave.** Be sure to provide a packet of information and include your business card. Some chapters have MS activist business cards, with a space to write in your personal information. Check with your chapter **materials that could be included in a packet that you leave behind...**

- **A personalized letter** to the legislator. This will serve as a quick reference for the office about your personal story and your top issues. [See tips and template letters below.](#)

- **A position paper on each issue** or piece of legislation with bill numbers, including the Society's position and why. Ask your chapter about any hot issues and position paper examples.
- **A background document** on the Society and/or the chapter, explaining who we are and what we do. Your chapter can provide an advocacy brochure, Just the Facts brochure, or Society Vision document for this purpose.
- **A story page** that summarizes your personal story on one page.

**After the visit.** Follow up with a thank you note or a call. [See tips and sample follow-up call script below.](#) Tell your chapter how it went. [Fill out the form below and send to your chapter.](#) For mail or email information, visit [www.nationalMSSociety.org/advocacy](http://www.nationalMSSociety.org/advocacy). That way we can track progress and continue to build those relationships. You also can send photos of your visit to the chapter for promotion opportunities.

**Build the relationship.** You can continue to build the relationship, by extending your conversation with the legislator. Send letters or postcards as issues develop or your story changes. Call if you're concerned about another issue. Or invite them to your self-help group, to visit the chapter, to join your walk or bike team, or to another event. You can do this any time throughout the year. When a legislator receives five or six constituent contacts about an issue, it elevates that issue and can really create change.

## Tips for Visiting with Your Legislator

- Get to know the legislator before you visit. Visit his or her web site, read their bio, and do a news search.
  - Is he or she a Republican, Democrat or Independent?
  - What committee(s) does he or she serve?
  - Is he or she the author of any recent, significant legislation?
  - Does he or she share a common perspective regarding an issue important to you?
- Arrive on time, but be prepared to wait. Day-to-day business can delay a legislator or staff.
- Identify yourself as your legislator's constituent. Provide your address and telephone number.
- Don't be surprised if your meeting with the legislator turns into a meeting with staff. Meeting with staff and building that relationship can be just as effective. Oftentimes, the legislator is a generalist, who relies upon staff for issue expertise.
- Rest assured that you are the credible expert on the effects of multiple sclerosis. Even if you don't know the specifics of an issue or piece of legislation, your personal story is most important. Relate your real-life experiences to the reasons why you support or oppose the issue.
- Rehearse your key points in advance and practice telling your story. If others are joining you, determine who will say what and when.
- Keep your conversation simple, concise, and clear. Avoid jargon and acronyms. Refrain from making assumptions. Do not presume those you visit with are versed in the issue important to you.
- Be clear about whether you intend for the legislator to support a bill or oppose a bill. If so, what is the specific bill number? Explain what specific action you would like your legislator to take.
- Preserve your credibility. If you do not know the answer to a specific question, say so and offer to follow up later.
- To conclude your meeting, thank him or her for visiting with you, provide your leavebehind materials, and leave contact information.

## Tips for Starting a Conversation and Sharing Your Personal Story

- First, introduce yourself and mention where you live. This will break the ice, and make sure they know you are a constituent.
- Thank the legislator or staff for their time.
- Then, share your personal story about multiple sclerosis. For example: “Let me start by telling you a little about myself. Are you familiar with multiple sclerosis?”
- Talk about your connection to multiple sclerosis. Explain MS, if they are unfamiliar. Share your experiences and the impact on your life. Be brief but descriptive.
- Then transition into one or two issues that are important to you. Explain your experience with the health care system. Talk about your access to local health care or community resources. Or explain how your life has been impacted by prescription drug costs, disability rights, or another issue.
- If it helps, use one of these transition phrases:
  - Because I live with MS, I’m most concerned about...
  - I’m sure you can understand why I feel strongly about MS issues. The most important thing to remember is...
  - People living with MS face many challenges, but if I could ask you to change one thing, it would be...
- At the end, ask if you can answer any questions. Then conclude the conversation by thanking the legislator or staff again for their time.

## Tips for Writing a Letter to Your Legislator

At your visit, it will be beneficial to include a thoughtful letter with your leavebehind materials. If you're writing before or after your visit, you can use email, fax, or snail mail. The sample letters below can help.

Whether you're mailing or emailing your letter, the format is the same. Address your letter to the highest official who has responsibility for the issue—your senator, the mayor, an executive, or a state agency director. Share your personal story and how the issue impacts you. Clearly state the action you want at the beginning of the letter. Remember to thank the legislator. And close with your full name and address.

E-mail is timely and less formal, but it is more common and oftentimes preferred by legislators. A brief, hand-written, hard-copy letter is more personal and can catch the attention of legislators and staff. Due to postal precautions in Washington, DC, it will be quicker and more effective to mail or fax letters to your legislator's local office.

# Sample Letters

## *Issue Specific Letter to Federal Legislator*

DATE

The Honorable NAME  
FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE BODY  
Washington, DC, ZIP

Dear TITLE AND LAST NAME:

As a constituent and a multiple sclerosis activist, I urge you to [clearly state the specific request you want from the official.]

Every hour in the United States, someone is newly diagnosed with MS. Multiple sclerosis, an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system, interrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body. Symptoms range from numbness and tingling to blindness and paralysis. The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted, but advances in research and treatment are moving us closer to a world free of MS.

More than [number of individuals in state living with MS] people in [State] live with MS. [Provide any supporting background, and share a personal story about how the issue impacts you.]

Challenges that our community faces may be addressed through increased MS research, disability rights, access to quality health care, long-term care resources, and accessible, affordable insurance. [Discuss in more detail the specific request you want from the official and why it is important to people living with MS.]

Thank you for your help moving us closer to a world free of MS. [At the end, restate the request and thank the official.]

Sincerely,

NAME  
ADDRESS  
PHONE NUMBER (OPTIONAL)

# Sample Letters

## *Issue Specific Letter to State Legislator*

DATE

The Honorable NAME  
STATE LEGISLATIVE BODY  
STATE CAPITAL CITY, STATE, ZIP

Dear TITLE AND LAST NAME:

As a constituent and a multiple sclerosis activist, I urge you to remember the most vulnerable citizens of our state as you have budget discussions this year. We understand the current fiscal situation and ask for sensible decisions that protect services that people living with MS and other disabilities rely on every day. [At the beginning, clearly state the specific request you want from the official.]

Every hour in the United States, someone is newly diagnosed with MS. Multiple sclerosis, an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system, interrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body. Symptoms range from numbness and tingling to blindness and paralysis. The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted, but advances in research and treatment are moving us closer to a world free of MS.

More than [number of individuals in state living with MS] people in [State] live with MS. [Provide any supporting background, and share a personal story about how the issue impacts you.]

Challenges that our community faces may be addressed through increased MS research, disability rights, access to quality health care, long-term care resources, and accessible, affordable insurance. [Discuss in more detail the specific request you want from the official and why it is important to people living with MS.]

Thank you for your help moving us closer to a world free of MS. [At the end, re-state the request and thank the official.]

Sincerely,

NAME  
ADDRESS  
PHONE NUMBER (OPTIONAL)

# Sample Letters

## *MS Awareness Week Letter*

DATE

The Honorable NAME  
STATE LEGISLATIVE BODY  
STATE CAPITAL CITY, STATE, ZIP

Dear TITLE AND LAST NAME:

As a constituent and a multiple sclerosis activist, I'd like to ask for your support for policies and programs that benefit people living with MS in our state. This week we recognize Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week. It's the perfect time to show your support for people living with MS by [state specific request here and why it is important].

Every hour in the United States, someone is newly diagnosed with MS. Multiple sclerosis, an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system, interrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body. Symptoms range from numbness and tingling to blindness and paralysis. The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted, but advances in research and treatment are moving us closer to a world free of MS.

More than [number of individuals in state living with MS] people in [State] live with MS. During Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week, show your support by [discuss your specific request, and share a personal story about how the issue impacts you.]

Thank you for helping move us closer to a world free of MS by [re-state the request].

Sincerely,

NAME  
ADDRESS  
PHONE NUMBER (OPTIONAL)

## **Tips for Calling Your Legislator's Office**

Before making a call, write out what you want to say. A phone call can be timely and informal. It also can offer immediate answers to questions. Know the issue and the bill number, if one is available. Be prepared so you can confidently tell your story and ask for the change you want. A legislative staffer will answer the phone and will most likely ask if you are a constituent of the district. If you are not a constituent, be prepared to explain why you are calling and how the issue impacts you.

## Sample Scheduling Call Script

### *Scheduling a In-District Office Visit*

**YOU:** Hello, my name is **NAME** from **CITY** in the Senator's district. I'm calling as a constituent and an MS activist **[add your personal connection to MS]** ... and I'd to schedule a visit.

**Staffer:** How may I help you?

**YOU:** Do you know when the Senator might be available to talk with me and a small group about the health care issues that are most important to us as constituents this year?

**Staffer:** The Senator is very busy. Are you looking at any particular day?

**YOU:** Our target days are **DATES**, but we can be flexible depending on the Senator's schedule.

**Staffer:** Great. Let's schedule a visit on ...

**YOU:** Thank you for your time. We're looking forward to it. If you need to reach me you can call me at **PHONE** or email me at **EMAIL**.

# Sample Follow-Up Call Script

## *MS Awareness Week*

- Staffer:** Senator Smith's office, how may I help you?
- YOU:** Hi, my name is **NAME** from **CITY** in the Senator's district. This week we are celebrating Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week, and I'm calling to ask the Senator to support sound policies that benefit people living with multiple sclerosis in our state.
- Staffer:** Thank you for calling. What bill number are you referring to?
- YOU:** **[Explain specific request]**.
- Staffer:** I'll convey your message.
- YOU:** Could you tell the Senator that I am living with MS **[PERSONAL STORY HERE]**, and this issue is important to me and other constituents? And please thank the Senator for me.
- Staffer:** I will. Thank you for calling.