

Speaking Out: Tips for Connecting with your Legislators

Getting started

- **Get to know the legislators in your district:** Read their website, find out what issues they support or oppose, explore their voting history, note the committees they serve on, and any bills they have authored.
 - Find your legislators at app.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/
- **Write it down:** Decide what issues are most important to you and how to present your message concisely (1-3 minutes and 1-2 issues).
- **Practice what you want to say** and think about your responses to questions beforehand.

Tips for Legislative Visits

1. Introduce yourself.

- Provide your name, mention that you are a constituent, and explain your connection to MS.
- Ask them if they know about MS.
 - If not, give a brief explanation: “Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system that disrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body.”
- Offer the leave-behind packet so they can refer to the materials while you talk.

2. Review the key points of the issue you are discussing.

- Refer to the materials in the leave-behind packet as needed.

3. Explain why the issue matters to people with MS.

- Tell your story. If possible, use your personal experience to show how the issue impacts your everyday life. Other stories and facts can help illustrate why this issue is important to you and people living with MS. You are the face of MS for that legislator – make it real.
- If you aren't sure of a story, share some general facts about how the issue affects people with MS and disabilities.

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4. Make the Ask.

- Be clear whether you intend for the legislator to support, oppose, or take some other action on a bill or program. (For example: Would you support increased funding for home modifications?)
- The legislator or staff may not have a definitive answer. But it's important to make an "ask" to show them how much it matters. It also gives you an opportunity to follow-up with that office and monitor their support.

5. Say thank you.

- Let them know that you appreciate their time.
- Ask for their business card.
- Send a thank you card (see example below).

Sample Thank You Note

After your visit, send a hand-written note or email to your legislator or the staff member. Your note helps leave an impression on the office and reminds them of your story and what you discussed. If writing is difficult for you, an email or phone call may be used as a substitute to a hand written note.

Dear **[legislator or staff member you met with]**,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me on **[insert date here]**. I enjoyed meeting with you and discussing issues affecting people with MS in our state. I look forward to working more with you in the future.

[If appropriate, include a specific reminder of the conversation you had with the legislator or staff member. For example: "As I mentioned, I will follow up with you in a few weeks regarding our discussion about your support for HB 123, which will...]

If you have any questions, you can reach me at **[enter email address and/or phone number]**. Thank you for helping move us towards a world free of MS!

Sincerely,
[Your name here]

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Stay Connected

- **Maintain a relationship with your legislators:** When you see them again, re-introduce yourself, remind them you are their constituent, and tell them you are a part of the National MS Society. Your goal is to become a valuable, honest, and reliable resource on issues that impact people living with MS.
- **Follow your legislators:** Track any changes that occur in the state budget, monitor how your legislator votes or what new bills they may be sponsoring, and contact them periodically to let them know how they're doing.
 - Tip: Go to leg.wa.gov for information on legislative activity.
- **Attend in district town halls:** Legislators usually hold one or more town halls in their home districts to inform their constituents of the issues being discussed in Olympia and to meet with constituents who cannot travel to the Capitol. Wear your orange scarf at these meetings and bring friends who may be new to advocacy.
- **Share your story in different ways:** Use face-to-face meetings, write letters or emails, call your legislators' office, or invite your legislator to attend your support group meeting or join your Walk or Bike MS team.
- **Stay Updated:** Make sure you are signed up for our MS Activist Network to stay updated on breaking news, MS issues, and ways to get involved. Visit www.nationalmssociety.org/MSActivist.

Ask us for help! We are here to support you in your work as an activist by providing you with guidance, information, and resources.

Contact:

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