

UNLOCK! Meeting Your Legislator

Know Your Legislators



Find out who your legislators are.

Visit www.Openstates.gov on your computer or phone.

Find out what is important to them.

<http://www.house.ga.gov/Representatives/en-US/HouseMembersList.aspx>

<http://www.senate.ga.gov/senators/en-US/SenateMembersList.aspx>

Preparing your issues

Know the facts. Do your homework on the issues. Be sure to identify if it is a local, state, or federal policy issue?

Have well-reasoned facts and figures on your state policy issue(s) ready, but do not be overwhelming. Be ready to answer questions and (when necessary) respond to counter-arguments made by your opponents. Know the opposition. Be familiar with what those with views different from your own are saying. Be prepared to respond to the opposing view. *Don't be afraid to say you don't know, but will get back to the legislator with needed information.* This gives you a wonderful opportunity to come back to the legislator for another meeting.

Importance of the 1-Pager



It is always good to prepare a “leave-behind” for your legislator. We recommend creating your very own one-pager and even have a template for you follow which you can find at <https://gcdd.org/telling-your-story-downloadable-document.html> . This can be as fancy or simple as you like. Typically, we tell people to include a photo, a summary of the issue, and how it impacts you or your family member.

Bonus materials to include, but are not required, are fact sheets and letters from other constituents. Often, organizations like GCDD might have fact sheets you can use.

How do you schedule a visit?



If it is during the GA legislative session (January – March), you will need to schedule a meeting at their Capitol Office in Atlanta. You can do this by calling their administrative assistant or sending an email.

If it is not during the GA legislative session, your legislator can be found at home in your community. If they have a local office, you can ask to meet them there. Otherwise, you can ask to meet at a local coffee shop or someplace similar.

To find your legislator's contact information visit one of two places.

1. Their official Georgia General Assembly page www.house.ga.gov or www.senate.ga.gov
2. Their re-election website

Be persistent. If you haven't heard back, wait a bit and then reach out again.

Confirm Your Appointment by phone or email soon after arranging the appointment and then again by phone the day before your appointment.

At the Meeting



Whether you are meeting in their local office, their Capitol office, or a coffee shop, the meeting will run the same way.

If this is the first time you are meeting one-on-one with your legislator, the goal of the meeting should be to get to know each other and start to build a relationship.

Make your presentation simple and straightforward. You may have only 5 or 10 minutes left by the time you get through with introductions and pleasantries.

Since you requested the meeting, your legislator will expect that you start the discussion. Follow this simple meeting outline:

- Introductions & thank-you: Begin the visit by introducing yourself and thanking the legislator for meeting with you.
- Explain the problem or issue you see in your community.
- Explain to the legislator why this issue is *important to your life* and why they should care about the issue. When possible, explain how the issue you are encountering is something that impacts many people in their district. If you have any memorable statistics, now is the time to share them.
- Talk about any potential solutions you are aware of and identify any relevant legislation. It is ok if you don't have any potential solutions to suggest. If you the solution is legislative, make a specific request for legislative action

Be pleasant even if you disagree. Alienating your legislator won't help. However, a healthy debate is productive if done respectfully.

Elevator Pitch?



You have done all the prep work and have your message planned for 15 minutes.

Unexpectedly the legislator tells you that he only has a few minutes. A lot of people would get flustered and overwhelmed, but not you! You have prepared for this very situation with your elevator pitch.

What is an elevator pitch? It's a short persuasive speech that you use when you don't have a lot of time. The goal of any elevator pitch is to get the person's attention so that they will want to continue the discussion later. As the name suggests, think about if you happened to get in the elevator with your legislator. You only have 20-60 seconds before the legislator reaches their floor, what do you say to get their attention.

This is the perfect speech to use when your legislator unexpectedly has to shorten your meeting, you run into them at the local grocery store or farmers market, or even if you come visit them at the capitol without an appointment to work the ropes.

Your elevator pitch should include the following:

- Who you are (Name, where you live, person/parent with a disability)
- What issue or topic you care about
- What you want to see changed & how they can help.
- Ask if we can continue this conversation later? Exchange contact information

Example: Hi, my name is Kab Alford from Carroll County and I would like to see more curb cuts in my community. As your constituent, will you help us get more funding for curb cuts? Would you be willing to talk about this more another time?

⇒ This is the extra short version. Once you have that version down, you just keep adding on depending on time available.

After the Meeting

Thank
You!

Send a thank you note and include any information you may have offered to provide during your visit. A written thank you note is best, but an email is fine too.

Your goal should be to begin or to continue to develop a relationship with your legislator and their staff.

Want to learn more?

Visit <https://gcdd.org/public-policy/becoming-a-grassroots-advocate.html>

GCDD and the UNLOCK! Coalition thanks the following groups for their outstanding curriculum's upon which this training relied upon heavily.

- ⇒ *Stacey Ramirez of The Arc US*
- ⇒ *Meeting with Your Legislators-Federal, State or Local-Learning Disabilities Association of America <https://ldaamerica.org/legislation/legislative-resources/meeting-with-your-legislators-federal-state-or-local/>*
- ⇒ *The Arc of Indiana Advocacy Guide https://www.arcind.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Advocacy-Guide_Web.pdf*
- ⇒ *National Council of Teachers of English <http://www.ncte.org/action/reqappt>*