



# How to meet with your legislators

Visiting a legislator's office, either locally or in Washington, D.C., is the most effective way for a citizen to do advocacy. You can look up your members of Congress and also view the congressional schedules online at [house.gov](http://house.gov) and [senate.gov](http://senate.gov). Congressional recesses are an excellent time to meet locally with your legislator.

**Schedule ahead.** Contact your legislator's office, preferably at least two weeks in advance, specifying the issue you wish to discuss. Mention a preferred date and length of meeting as well as the number of people coming.

**Research.** Make sure you are aware in advance of the current status of relevant legislation, the pros and cons of the argument, and the member's voting record and committee assignments. MCC U.S. Peace & Justice Ministries is happy to help with this.

**Strategize.** If you are visiting as a group, your group should plan to meet prior to the visit and identify the most important things you want to convey. It is often helpful to appoint a spokesperson or two who are responsible for explaining the issue and making the group's

specific request. Prepare supporting materials that you can leave with the office.

During the meeting:

- **Introduce yourselves.** Have each person introduce him/herself. If appropriate, identify your affiliation with MCC and/or the congregation(s) you represent.
- **Be flexible.** Be prepared for both a 5 minute meeting as well as a 45 minute meeting. It is not uncommon for the schedules of legislators and their aides to change at the last minute. Be prepared to get your point across even if you have a short meeting.
- **Be clear and respectful.** Keep your main message clear and concise, between three to five points. Whenever possible, include personal stories. Be polite and respectful, but don't be afraid

to disagree. It is fine to respond to a legislator's question by admitting you do not know. Offer to find out and send information back to the office.

- **Ask questions.** Ask what the legislator's position is on the issue and why. Ask if they are hearing from opponents or supporters and what they are saying. Ask what will influence their decision on this issue. Try to ensure that it is a conversation and the discussion is not monopolized by either the legislator or the group.
- **Leave materials.** It is useful to bring supporting materials or position papers to leave with the person you meet.

**Write follow-up email.** After the meeting, send an email thanking the legislator for the meeting. Reiterate your position and your understanding of any commitments made during the meeting.

Afterwards, let us know how it went!



MCC photo/Christina Rodriguez



**Mennonite  
Central  
Committee**