

VISITING YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETING



Meeting with members of Congress, or their staff, is an important way to educate them about the issues that are important to transgender people.

Preparing for your visit can help ensure a successful and smooth visit with members of Congress. Here are some things to consider.

ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM

In general, when visiting with an elected official you should not visit alone. Try to bring a small group of two to four people with you on your visit. Having multiple people provides multiple perspectives that may better educate the officeholder about the realities of anti-transgender discrimination and the violence we face. Also, each individual may hear what the officeholder says differently, and thus provide a richer and more accurate picture of how a meeting went and what follow-up may be needed.

When assembling a “team” of constituents, try for diverse representation from the transgender people and allies in your area. Diverse groups bring added perspectives, skills and presence that a homogeneous group cannot and help to break stereotypes. Diversity is an important goal in all transgender organizing and especially important when educating legislators about transgender lives and issues. We want legislators to have an accurate picture of who we are. Some suggestions of who to include are on page 3.

While it is important that transgender voices speak for transgender people, allies are often passionate and convincing educators on our behalf. Having allies at the meeting also shows broader political support for your position. Allies may have existing relationships with the member of Congress and therefore are better able to influence a legislator’s opinions.

FOR INFORMATION, PHONE AND FAX NUMBERS AND SCHEDULES:
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES: <http://www.house.gov>
THE SENATE: <http://www.senate.gov>

GET TOGETHER TO PLAN YOUR STRATEGIES

Gather your team in advance, if at all possible, so that you can share information and agree upon strategies for your meeting. Agree on the focus of your meeting with your Congressional representative, how you will introduce yourselves and the basic talking points you intend to cover. Holding a practice session is an excellent idea and will help you feel more confident and prepared for the actual meeting. Because appointments with members of Congress are often brief (usually fifteen to twenty minutes), taking the time to prepare carefully will help you use that time wisely to focus on your most important issues.

You may also want to divide up roles for the meeting. It is helpful to have one person designated as the leader, who can guide the introductions, move things along, and be sure that the right questions get asked at the end of the meeting. It is also very useful to have someone take notes of your meeting so you'll remember what has been said.

PLANNING WHAT INFORMATION TO SHARE

Research the issues so that you have the latest information about bills that impact transgender people that the legislature might be considering. It can be very helpful to leave information for the member of Congress and their staff to read later; keep it to no more than one page or it will be very unlikely to be read.

Think through how to tell your personal story and what other examples you can share. It is most effective to keep the information personal, concrete, and relevant to your district/state. See our fact sheet on “During Your Meeting” for more information. Avoid theoretical discussions and keep it practical.

PLANNING WHAT TO WEAR

Congress is a formal institution, so plan to dress professionally for your meeting. Members of Congress and their staffs usually will be wearing suits and ties for men, and suits, dress slacks or skirts, with a blouse or dress sweater for women. It is appropriate to dress in a similar fashion. You should, however, feel free to dress according to your chosen gender presentation.

If you are participating in NCTE's Lobby Day, you will receive a briefing and training to help you prepare for your meeting. We will help you get up to date on the latest issues and give you information to leave behind.

SOME POSSIBLE TEAM MEMBERS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR VISIT:

- Transgender people who have personally experienced discrimination or violence. This helps communicate to the legislator that discrimination is a problem in her or his district.
- Transgender people from local support groups, including transmen's groups and groups representing people of color. This helps show the diversity of transgender people and adds a broader perspective.
- Parents, siblings, spouses or children of transgender people. They may be able to connect with the legislator and explain issues from a non-transgender perspective.
- Co-workers or supervisors of transgender people. They can explain what it is like working with a transgender person and how workplace issues have been handled in a positive manner.
- Human resource or business leaders. Similar to co-workers, these folks can convincingly make the argument that non-discrimination makes good business sense and that having transgender employees is not a problem.
- Social workers. They can communicate effectively the devastating impact of discrimination on communities and individuals within that community. Consider a social worker from an organization that works with LGBT youth, the homeless or a community mental health center.
- Leaders from your local/state LGBT advocacy organization (if they are transgender supportive). Their presence will convey the message that the local LGBT voting bloc cares about this issue.
- Leaders from the local LGBT partisan organization or local party leadership (if they are transgender-supportive). Consider bringing Republicans to meet with Republicans and Democrats to meet with Democrats etc.
- Leaders from local congregations. They can help ease the legislator's concern that people of faith do not support transgender equality.
- Leaders of other civil rights organizations. Leaders of the NAACP, NOW, or the ACLU, etc., may be influential with a legislator who cares about the concerns of these groups. They can help educate the member of Congress that justice issues are interconnected.
- Other community leaders. Their presence should help the legislator understand that transgender equality has wider support than the legislator realizes.
- People who have worked in local politics with the legislator. Bringing in people who the legislator specifically knows and values can help them realize that their community and their supporters believe in transgender equality.
- Donors or volunteers from the legislator's campaign. The legislator may be very interested and influenced by those she knows are her core supporters.
- Union representatives. Depending on the legislator, union leaders may carry a lot of influence.

IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE OR HAVE OTHER QUESTIONS

Please contact NCTE for additional assistance if you need it. We would be glad to work with you to help you meet with your member of Congress. We can provide information and assistance to you to help make the meeting a success. We also want to know how the meeting went so that we can better understand the positions that your Representative and Senators are taking.