

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL IN-PERSON MEETING WITH YOUR TENNESSEE STATE LEGISLATOR



Keep in mind: your goal is to develop an ongoing personal relationship with your elected representatives, not to “win” a single meeting. Every conversation builds trust, and trust is what moves policy.

BEFORE YOUR MEETING

- **Know your legislator.** Visit capitol.tn.gov to find your representative and senator, learn what committees they serve on, and read a little about them. Are their committees relevant to your issues? Do they have a personal connection to disability or healthcare?
- **Think beyond your own district.** Consider building relationships with legislative leaders who chair relevant committees or hold other leadership roles — even if they don’t represent you directly.
- **Prepare your key points.** Write down the two or three things you most want to say and practice them out loud. Appointments move quickly — sometimes just 5 to 15 minutes — so knowing your material means you’ll stay calm and clear when it counts.
- **Limit your topics.** Focus on one issue or bill, two at most. Bringing too many issues at once risks confusing your legislator or diluting your most important ask.
- **Expect to be the expert.** Your legislator may not know much about the needs and experiences of people with disabilities. Be patient, speak in plain language, and skip the jargon and acronyms. You’re there to educate as much as to advocate.
- **Don’t be intimidated.** Legislators will look to you as the expert on this issue and on your own life. You belong in that conversation.

IN YOUR MEETING

- **Courtesy:** Always be courteous to legislative staff members and legislators alike. Staff often have more influence than people realize — they brief the legislator before and after your meeting.
- **The Introduction:** Quickly identify yourself, where you’re from, and the issue you’re there to discuss. “I’m [Name] from [City], and I’m here to talk about [issue].” That’s all you need.
- **Share Your Personal Story:** This is your most powerful tool. A real experience, yours or your family member’s, does far more than any statistic. Be specific and honest.
- **Respect Time Limits:** Be brief, prepared, clear, honest, accurate, persuasive, and grateful. If you’re running long, wrap up gracefully and offer to follow up in writing.

- **Listen:** This is a two-way conversation. Ask questions. Find out where your legislator stands and what concerns they have. You might learn something useful.
- **Agree to Disagree:** Don't debate or issue ultimatums. You're building a relationship that may span years. Respect the legislator's right to disagree, and keep the door open.
- **Say Thank You:** Thank the legislator and their staff before you leave. It matters more than you might think.



MAKE IT PERSONAL WITH PHOTOS & HANDWRITTEN NOTES

Before you leave your meeting, take a photo with the legislator, in the Capitol building, or with your group. A photo makes the meeting real and memorable for both of you.

When you send your follow-up thank you note, include:

- A printed photo from your visit, legislators and their staff genuinely appreciate these, and they often end up on office walls.
- A handwritten note alongside your typed summary. Even a sentence or two in your own handwriting signals that this is personal, not a form letter.



MEETING AS A GROUP? ASSIGN ROLES & AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT

When meeting with a legislator as a group, designate one speaker and a note-taker in advance, and agree on your key message so you make the most of your time.



AFTER YOUR MEETING

- **Follow up promptly.** Send a written thank-you note within a day or two. Recap your main ask and any commitments made in the meeting. Include your contact information.
- **Include a photo and personal note.** A handwritten note with a photo is one of the most effective follow-ups you can send. It's rare, it's human, and it's hard to forget.
- **Stay connected.** Follow your legislator on social media. Engage with their posts when relevant. Reach out when new developments arise. Relationships are built over time, not in a single visit.
- **Share your experience.** Tell other advocates how it went. Your insights help your community prepare for their own meetings.

DON'T FORGET TO HAVE FUN WITH IT!
WITH EVERY MEETING, YOU'LL GROW MORE CONFIDENT AND MORE EFFECTIVE.