

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETING WITH YOUR TENNESSEE STATE LEGISLATOR



Distance is no barrier to making your voice heard. **Virtual meetings are just as powerful as in-person ones when you show up prepared and personal.** Keep in mind: your goal is to develop an ongoing personal relationship with your elected representatives, not to “win” a single meeting.

BEFORE YOUR VIRTUAL MEETING

- **Know your legislator.** Visit capitol.tn.gov to find your representative and senator, see which committees they serve on, and learn what issues they care about. Most Tennessee legislators also maintain Facebook and X (Twitter) accounts — scroll through them to get a sense of their priorities before you meet.
- **Think beyond your own district.** Consider reaching out to legislative leaders who chair committees relevant to disability, healthcare, or education — even if they don’t represent you personally.
- **Prepare your key points.** Write down the two or three things you most want to say, and practice out loud. Virtual appointments can move just as quickly as in-person ones, often 5 to 15 minutes, so knowing your material will keep you calm and clear.
- **Limit your topics.** Focus on one issue or bill, two at most. Too many issues at once can dilute your message and leave your legislator unsure what you’re asking them to do.
- **Expect to be the expert.** Your legislator may have little experience with disability issues. Be patient, use plain language, and skip the jargon and acronyms. You’re there to educate as much as to advocate.
- **Don’t be intimidated.** Legislators will see you as the expert on your own experience. You have every right to be in that conversation.

SETTING UP YOUR SPACE

- **Find a quiet, well-lit spot.** Choose a location where you won’t be interrupted. Natural light or a lamp in front of you (not behind) will make you look clear and approachable on camera.
- **Dress for the meeting.** Business-casual is a safe choice — similar to what your legislator will likely be wearing. It signals that you take the meeting seriously.

- **Test your tech early.** Log on 5 to 10 minutes before the meeting to confirm your camera, microphone, and speakers are working. Keep your phone nearby as a backup in case you need to call in.
- **Consider what's visible behind you.** A clean, neutral background keeps the focus on you and your message.

IN YOUR VIRTUAL MEETING

- **Courtesy:** Be courteous to legislative staff and legislators alike. Staff often brief the legislator before and after your meeting — their impression of you matters
- **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]." Simple and clear.
- **Share Your Personal Story:** This is your strongest tool. A real experience, yours or your family member's, is more persuasive than any statistic. Be specific and honest.
- **Respect Time Limits:** Be brief, prepared, clear, honest, and grateful. If you're running short on time, wrap up with your main ask and offer to follow up in writing.
- **Listen:** This is a two-way conversation. Ask questions, find out where your legislator stands, and take notes. You might learn something valuable about how to move forward.
- **Agree to Disagree:** Don't debate or issue ultimatums. You're building a relationship that may span many years. Keep the door open even if you leave without full agreement.
- **Say Thank You:** Thank the legislator and their staff before you sign off.



MAKE IT PERSONAL WITH PHOTOS & HANDWRITTEN NOTES

A virtual meeting can still lead to a deeply personal follow-up. After your call, send a thank-you note that makes a lasting impression:

- Include a printed family photo or a screenshot from your video call. Legislators genuinely appreciate these, and they often end up displayed in their offices.
- Write a brief handwritten note alongside your typed summary. Even just 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

If you're meeting as a group over video, designate one person as the lead speaker and one as the note-taker. Brief each other beforehand so your message is coordinated and consistent.

**HELPFUL
TIPS**



AFTER YOUR VIRTUAL MEETING

- **Follow up promptly.** Send a thank you note within a day or two. Recap your main ask and any commitments the legislator made. Include your contact information so they can reach you easily.
- **Include a photo and personal note.** Physical mail stands out in a world of emails. A handwritten note with a photo is rare, human, and hard to forget.
- **Stay connected on social media.** Follow your legislator on Facebook, X (Twitter), and/or Instagram. Engage with their posts when the topic is relevant to your issues. Relationships are built over time, not in a single call.
- **Thank them publicly.** A quick post on your own social media, or a comment on theirs, thanking your legislator for their time, reinforces the connection and demonstrates community support.
- **Share what you learned.** Tell other advocates how the meeting went. Your insights help the whole community prepare for their own conversations.

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