



## MPGV Tips for Advocacy Meetings with Legislators

### Recruiting volunteers to meet with key legislators

**Number of participants.** Aim for 4 to 8 people for an in-person meeting (there may be space constraints), and 4 to 8+ people if you are meeting virtually.

**Composition of group.** If possible, include *at least* one person who lives in the legislative district of the Senator or Delegate (a constituent). Elected officials are primarily interested in the views of their constituents. The meeting need not be limited to constituents, and other attendees from the same county, region, or even across the state, can convey a message of broader support.

**Contact person.** Identify a contact person for the group, preferably a constituent, who will be responsible for correspondence with the legislator and staff. This keeps interactions on track and avoids inconsistent messaging.

### Scheduling meetings

**Who should we meet with?** No group will have unlimited time or volunteer resources, so focus on meetings that will maximize your impact. Prioritize meeting with (1) the chair of the committee to which a bill is assigned, (2) the vice chair of that committee, and (3) other committee members if they represent a district in which a member of your group lives—remember, constituent voices carry extra weight.

**What is the best way to schedule a meeting?** Send a short email to the legislator identifying your group, the issues you are interested in discussing, possible dates/times, and location (in person/Zoom). You can find email addresses for legislators on the Maryland General Assembly website: <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Members/District>. An email is preferable to a phone call or voicemail because it provides a record of the request and makes it easier for staff to process the scheduling.

**When should we meet?** Try to meet with committee leaders and members early in the session, before a hearing takes place. If this option cannot be arranged, schedule the meeting as soon after the committee hearing as possible—when the issue is still fresh in everyone’s mind and you can refer to points presented at the hearing to encourage a prompt committee vote of approval.

**Should we meet in person or on Zoom?** Legislators are back in Annapolis, so in-person meetings are once again available. If your group is able to travel to Annapolis for a meeting, that is generally preferable. The advantage of Zoom is that you might be able to assemble a larger group of participants with greater flexibility as to date and time. If either option is possible for your group, leave it up to the legislator to decide.

**What if the legislator doesn’t respond to the meeting request?** If you don’t receive a response to the request within a week, follow up by email or phone call. If you do not receive a timely reply after your second try, contact another legislator who may be more responsive.



## Holding meetings

Meetings are usually scheduled for 30 minutes. Plan for your presentation to take a total of no more than 10-15 minutes to allow time for the legislator to respond with questions and comments. In addition to the legislator, members of their staff may attend. Occasionally, pressing matters will prevent a legislator from attending, and you will meet only with staff. Proceed with a positive attitude! You should be prepared with (1) an agenda including a list of attendees and their email addresses, (2) a designated moderator, (3) one or more designated speakers who will present talking points, and (4) a designated note-taker.

**(1) *Email your agenda*** to the legislator a day or two before the meeting. As available, attach background information for the issues/bills you are going to discuss. If you are meeting in person, bring several hard copies of the agenda and attachments for the legislator and staff members.

**(2) *The designated moderator*** will run the meeting, but they should defer to the legislator who may want to get into details or focus on a particular issue, deviating from the prepared agenda. Go with the flow! The legislator's interest and engagement are as important as getting through everything you want to talk about. The moderator should give a very brief introduction, call on participants to introduce themselves, call on speakers in turn, offer a closing summary, and thank the legislator for the meeting and either (1) their support or (2) serious consideration of the issues.

**(3) *A designated speaker*** should present talking points and lead the discussion for each bill you are supporting. The speaker does not have to be a subject matter expert. Others can offer remarks, including personal stories, after the designated speaker is finished or in response to questions from the legislator. However, all participants should be mindful that it is important to stay on task and limit comments to those that are critical to getting across the message. If the legislator asks a question that no one can answer, the designated speaker can offer to follow up with the legislator.

**(4) *Designate a note-taker*** who will circulate discussion notes to the group and MPG.V.

## After the meeting

***Send a thank-you.*** The contact person should promptly send a thank-you email to the legislator.

***Answer questions and finalize commitments.*** If the legislator or staff person asked questions that could not be answered at the meeting, promptly follow up with an answer, ideally within a few days of the meeting. If the legislator did not declare their position(s) on legislation at the meeting, the contact person could also ask if further information would be helpful to them in making their decision.

**Questions? Ideas? Contact us at [info@mdpgv.org](mailto:info@mdpgv.org).**

Please share news about your meeting, including meeting agendas, notes, and voting commitments from legislators, with MPG.V by emailing [info@mdpgv.org](mailto:info@mdpgv.org). This information will enable MPG.V to assist other advocates in formulating their meeting presentations, testimonies, and grassroots messages.