



Maine Equal Justice

Tips for Talking to a Legislator

1. You have important information to share.

Lawmakers have limited time, staff, and information on any one issue. They can't be informed on all the issues, and they may not know about the issues that matter to you. Don't assume they know what you know. YOU can fill the information gap.

2. Introduce yourself. Make it personal.

Tell the lawmaker your name, where you live, and why they should listen to you. Are you directly affected by the issue? Do you know someone who is? Draw the connection from the issue to you and your community. Sometimes a personal story can be the KEY thing that changes a lawmakers mind.

3. Tell the truth.

There is no faster way to lose their trust and attention than to give false information to your lawmaker. It's ok not to know everything and to share honestly what you do know.

4. Know who is on your side.

It is helpful for the lawmaker to know what other groups, individuals, and/or lawmakers are also working with you on the issue.

5. Know the opposition.

Who is on the other side of the issue? Know what their arguments might be and share your perspective with the lawmaker.

6. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something.

If the legislator asks you a question you do not know or wants information you do not have, that's ok! You can offer to get the information they are looking for with the help of Maine Equal Justice.

- 7. Be specific about what you are asking them to do. Make sure you ask them to do something concrete before the conversation closes!**

Do you want them to vote a particular way on a particular bill? Ask them directly. Do you want an answer to a specific question? Say so. The legislator should walk away from the conversation completely understanding why you talked to them in the first place and what you want them to do in response, even if they say no.

- 8. Follow up.**

Send them a thank you message the same day of your conversation. Find out if your legislator did/did not do what you asked them to do. After the vote, call them or write an email thanking them again or ask for an explanation.

- 9. Don't burn any bridges.**

It is good to bring passion to these conversations. The issues we work on together are very important. Just remember to leave the conversation on as positive a note as you can, even if you and the legislator disagree. Building a relationship with the legislator for the long term could be important to your efforts in the future.

- 10. Remember: YOU elected them!**

Your tax money pays the salary of the legislator. YOU are the employer and they are the employee. We should be courteous and respectful, but don't be intimidated. It is their job to listen to you and represent you. Lawmakers are often very grateful for your input.