

Meet with Your Legislators

Meeting with your state legislator is the most effective and rewarding way to advocate for death with dignity. There is no greater persuasive force than looking someone in the eye and sharing a personal story about why a death with dignity law will make a difference.

If you've never met with a lawmaker before, meeting face-to-face is memorable and often unforgettable. Even if you didn't vote for the legislator, as your district's representative in the state legislature they work for you and have a duty to hear your concerns.



Don't know who your representatives are? Don't worry, that's actually very common. Check your legislature's website or [OpenStates.org](https://www.openstates.org) and use your address to find out who represents you in your state legislature.

BEFORE THE MEETING

An effective meeting with your State Representative (Delegate, Assembly Member) or Senator starts long before you see them face-to-face. The better you prepare for the meeting, the more effective it will be. Recommendations to help you prepare for your legislator meeting include:

1. Contact the legislator (their office) by email or phone to request a meeting.
 - Mention you are a constituent and where you live (town/city).
 - Refer to the bill you wish to discuss, if there is one, or simply state you wish to discuss death with dignity legislation (or topic of interest).
 - Suggest specific dates and times for the meeting.
2. Confirm the time and place of the meeting one day before the scheduled date.
3. Prepare no more than five pages of information to leave with your legislator, including
 - 1 page summary sheet explaining the bill (example)
 - 1 page talking points (example)
 - 1–3 pages containing personal stories (starting with yours), data excerpts, or FAQs
4. Make sure your leave-behind materials include contact information for you or your group.

Practice or role-play ahead of time to feel more comfortable if you aren't experienced in meeting lawmakers. Keep it short and focused; you will likely have 15 minutes or less for discussion.

THE DAY OF THE MEETING

The meeting with your legislator will typically take place at the legislator's district office or a public place like a cafe or coffee shop. During the legislative session, the legislator may request to meet you at your State Capitol, provided you can make it there.

No matter where you meet, follow these tips before you set out:

- Be on time. Build in a buffer to find parking, go through security, navigate the building.
- Verify the meeting details, including location and time, and check the directions and any parking instructions.
- Dress appropriately, e.g. as you might for a job interview. It's better to be overdressed than too casual.
- Have something to eat/drink ahead of time.
- Remember the legislator is human—a person like you. Being a state legislator is their job, often unpaid and often performed outside their regular, paying work.
- Be prepared to wait or meet with a staff member if your legislator isn't available (they may be at a hearing, floor session, or caucus). Be patient. It is common for legislators to be delayed or redirected at the last minute.
- If your appointment is cancelled, ask to leave a note and schedule a new meeting time.

DURING THE MEETING

It's time to meet your legislator! These tips should help the meeting run smoothly and be an effective advocacy action in support of aid in dying:

- Introduce yourself as a constituent who lives in your legislator's district and thank them for meeting with you.
- Share your story.
- Outline the reasons you support death with dignity; include bill number if applicable.
- Present your legislator with your prepared materials.
- Be brief and to the point. Aim for your introduction, story, and arguments to take about 4–5 minutes.
- Ask your legislator about their position on the bill and the reasons for the position.
 - If the position is positive, thank the legislator for their support of death with dignity and ask them how you can help them advocate for it.
 - If the position is negative, give a brief response to the main points of contention. If you don't know how to respond, revert to FAQs and any available polling data that show the majority of Americans / state residents / legislator's constituents support the bill.

- If the legislator does not yet have a position or declines to answer one way or another, ask when you should be back in touch to hear how they intend to respond.
- If your legislator asks questions and you do not have ready answers, simply say, "I don't know but I will find out." Find out how soon the answer is needed and be sure to email or call the legislator with a timely answer. Saying "I don't know" can be a strong political move because it gives you an opportunity to address another aspect of the issue, include more supporting information, and lets you touch base with the legislator again.
- If it feels right, ask your legislator to take a photo with you and post it on your social media channels after the meeting.

IF YOU ATTEND AS A GROUP

You might join forces with other supporters of death with dignity and meet with your district's legislators as a group. In addition to the above advice, follow these tips:

Limit your group's size to no more than 5 or 6 people so it stays manageable.

- Identify a leader who will speak on your group's behalf. This is ideally the person who is best versed with the bill you are advocating for so they can answer the legislator's questions or address their concerns.
- Agree on (and practice) talking points so your group is unified.
- Have your group leader initiate and facilitate the discussion, from thanking the legislator and quickly introducing each member to asking their position to answering questions or addressing objections.
- During introductions, each group member should take no more than a couple of minutes to introduce themselves as a constituent who lives in the legislator's district, and share a story about why the death with dignity bill is important to them

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

All of these resources are from the Community Tool Box developed by the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas.

- [Developing and Maintaining Ongoing Relationships with Legislators and their Aides](#)
- [Lobbying Decisionmakers](#)
- [Criticizing Unfavorable Action](#)

AFTER THE MEETING

The meeting with your legislator was the first step in cultivating an effective grassroots lobbying relationship with them, particularly if they're supportive of death with dignity. What happens after the meeting is just as important as what happens during the meeting.

It is crucial to follow up in a timely fashion to any requested materials or information, or to answer any questions you said you could not answer at the meeting. If you attended as a group, compare notes following the meeting to be clear on what was said or committed to.

Send a handwritten thank-you note to the legislator for meeting with you (if you met with their staffer, refer to that fact in your note).



The power of courtesy in the form of a handwritten note should not be underestimated. If you met with your legislator as a group, each person should send their own, individual note. As with all grassroots advocacy, there is strength in numbers.

If your legislator does not meet their agreed deadline for following up with you, ask for a response or a new deadline. Be patient and be persistent.