

How to Build a Relationship with Your State Legislators

One of the most effective ways to influence your legislator is to meet with him or her in person. You can share your concerns directly, ask questions about policy issues related to state public lands and learn about your legislator's perspective on an issue relevant to state parks and forests.

Legislators debate and vote on hundreds of bills each session and it's difficult—if not impossible—for them to understand all the nuances and ramifications of each one. That's why it's important for them to meet with those who have special knowledge about how a proposed piece of legislation could affect constituents.

Likewise it's helpful for you to understand why a legislator holds a particular position on an issue because this opens the door for conversation, education and persuasion.

You don't have to travel all the way to Harrisburg to meet with your state Representative or Senator or his or her staff. It's often easier to get an appointment in the home district office, where you'll have just as much influence.

Finally, don't forget to thank you legislators for their actions. Too often, they only hear the criticism for their position or vote. Let them know that your noticed and appreciate their actions.

Form a delegation

Legislators will be more eager to meet with you if you have a small group that represents a range of his or her constituents. It helps to have several people who can present your point of view from different perspectives. For example an academic, a businessperson and the president of a local hiking club could represent a variety of perspectives on the state parks and forests in your region.

You should also invite your legislators to a Friends event where they can meet a group of their constituents and see first-hand why the state parks and forests are so important to them. Be sure to also invite your local newspapers to cover the event because your legislator wants the broader community to know he or she is involved and engaged.

How to set up a meeting

Write a letter or call the legislator's District Office

A written request is sometimes more effective than a verbal request, but regardless of whether you write or call be sure to state:

- Who will be part of your delegation, with their titles or affiliations
- What you want: a 30-minute meeting with legislator or staff in the local office
- When you want to meet: specify the days and times your delegation can meet
- Why you want to meet: give a brief summary of the issue you want to discuss.

Follow up

Legislator's offices receive hundreds of pieces of mail each day. Make sure your request for a meeting doesn't get lost in the shuffle. Follow up two to three days later to ask if they received it and when you should expect an answer.

How to prepare for the meeting

It helps to know what issues your state legislator has particular influence. For example, he or she is more likely to be able to change policy if he chairs or serves on a relevant committee that is considering the legislative issue you want to discuss. But if your member isn't on a committee considering an issue related to parks and forests don't let that stop you from contacting him or her.

It's also important to know how he voted on your issue in the past.

So before your first contact with your legislator's office, please visit the Pennsylvania General Assembly website <http://www.legis.state.pa.us> where you will find a drop down menu that will help you identify and connect with your state Representative and Senator. You can also learn some important background information, his or her committee assignments, and the bills under consideration in that committee.

You can also learn what bills are before various committees or learn the status of bills by searching by its name or number.

During your legislative visit

- Greet your legislator warmly, and thank him or her for his time.
- Introduce yourself and your delegation briefly and explain why the issue you are there to discuss matters so much to you. Be personal and specific.
- Have an index card that outlines specific talking points you want to communicate so you stay on topic.
- Back up your position with facts and statistics.
- Regardless of what position the legislator expresses on your issue, remain polite, don't interrupt and listen carefully.
- If you disagree on a particular point, after he or she finishes speaking state your opposing position calmly and explain your point of view.
- Leave a fact sheet, infographic or pictures that support your position. Have your contact information on any leave-behind documents.
- End your meeting on a warm, friendly note and thank him or her again for his time.

Please contact Marci Mowery if you have questions and to let PPF know what you learned during your legislative visit.

Legislator Outreach Phone Script

A telephone call is a quick, effective way to reach your legislator's office. Understand that you will most likely talk with his or her aide, rather than directly to your legislator. That's fine; the aide will communicate the substance of your call to your legislator. Be polite and keep the conversation focused on a single issue. Always tie-in how the issue personally affects you and others in your legislator's district.

Here's a sample phone script you can use. NOTE: This script is intended to be a preparation tool and example. Speak from the heart in your own words to keep the conversation natural and interactive. It's ok to jot down a few "talking points" ahead of time, but you don't want to sound as if you are reading a transcript. Just be yourself, be sincere and be polite.

Good [morning or afternoon], my name is _____, from [NAME OF CITY OR TOWN] and I am one of [Representative or Senator LAST NAME's] constituents.

I am calling [his or her] office today because I am very concerned about how proposed [insert issue here] would affect [NAME OF PARK OR FOREST], where I volunteer with [NAME OF FRIENDS GROUP].

Pennsylvania's beautiful public lands tremendously enhance our quality of life. For example in [NAME OF PARK OR FOREST] alone, we enjoy a wide variety of recreational activities such as [LIST A FEW, E.G. HIKING, BIRDING, FISHING, MOUNTAIN BIKING]. Funding cuts translate into less grounds-keeping maintenance, fewer ranger-led programs, and reduced access and amenities for those of us living in [CITY OR TOWN]. While our volunteer efforts to [SPECIFY YOUR GROUP'S RECENT TASKS E.G. ELIMINATE INVASIVE SPECIES, CLEAR TRAILS, ETC.] helps offset some of the park staff's maintenance backlog caused by previous budget cuts, we can't keep up.

Pennsylvania's 120 state parks and 2.2 million acres of forest contribute to our quality of life, purify our air and water and support the state economy. Our public lands also support a vast timber industry, increase property values and attract businesses to our state. In fact, it's estimated that for every dollar the state invests in Pennsylvania's parks and forests, more than \$12 is returned to the state.

That's why I urge [Representative or Senator LAST NAME] to support the Keystone Fund at full funding levels with no money diverted to the general revenue.

[OPTIONAL INVITE TO FRIENDS EVENT:] Our next [MEETING OR EVENT] is set for [TIME, DATE, PLACE] and we would be very pleased to have [Representative or Senator LAST NAME's] join us to see for [HIMSELF/HERSELF] how [HIS OR HER] constituents benefit from our state lands. Will you please extend our invitation and let me know if [Representative or Senator LAST NAME] will be able to attend?

[OPTIONAL REQUEST TO MEET WITH YOUR LOCAL LEGISLATOR]

At [HIS OR HER] convenience, I would like to schedule a brief meeting between [Representative or Senator LAST NAME's], myself and [ADD NAMES AND AFFILIATIONS(s) of YOUR DELEGATION] so we can provide some information for [HIM OR HER] to consider when faced with votes that could affect our public lands.

I look forward to hearing from [Representative or Senator LAST NAME's]. My name, again, is _____ from [TOWN OR CITY] my phone number is [XXX_XXX_XXXX].

Thank you for relaying my concern.

Sample Letter to Your Legislator

[YOUR FULL NAME]
[FRIENDS OF _____ STATE _____ PARK OR FOREST]
[STREET ADDRESS]
[CITY], [PA] [ZIP]

[DATE]

The Honorable [FULL NAME]
Pennsylvania State Senate
OR
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
[DISTRICT OFFICE ADDRESS]

Dear Representative [LAST NAME]:

OR

Dear Senator [LAST NAME]:

(NOTE: IF YOUR STATE LEGISLATOR CHAIR'S A COMMITTEE YOUR SALUTATION SHOULD READ: DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: OR DEAR MADAM CHAIRWOMAN:)

As your constituent who is a member of the Friends of [PARK OR FOREST NAME] State [PARK OR FOREST], I am adamantly opposed to Governor Corbett's proposed budget cut to the Keystone Recreation Parks and Conservation Fund and the reallocation of those funds to general operations budget.

[State Park OR Forest] is a beautiful example of Pennsylvania's nationally-recognized state park and forest system. I especially enjoy [ACTIVITY] in [STATE PARK OR FOREST NAME] which is why I volunteer to help [FRIENDS GROUP] maintain the park for others to enjoy.

Pennsylvania's 120 state parks and 2.2 million acres of forest substantially contribute to residents' quality of life by providing a wide variety of outdoor recreational opportunities, purifying our air and water and supporting the local economy. Our public lands also support a vast timber industry, increase property values and attract businesses to our state.

It's estimated that for every dollar the state invests in Pennsylvania's parks and forests, more than \$12 is returned to the state in supporting businesses such as [NAME OF LOCAL BUSINESS –E.G. OURDOOR OUTFITTER, BAIT AND TACKLE SHOP, SANDWICH OR COFFEE THAT BENEFITS FROM VISITORS TO YOUR STATE PARK OR FOREST.]

[USE THIS OPTIONAL ALTERNATE PARAGRAPH]

I would like to personally invite you to attend [NAME OF EVENT] on [TIME AND DATE] at [LOCATION] to see for yourself what makes our state parks and forests so precious and to talk to several of your other constituents who are eager to share how [LOCAL PARK OR FOREST] contributes to their quality of life.

[OR THIS ALTERNATE OPTIONAL PARAGRAPH]

At your convenience, I would much appreciate about 30 minutes of your time to meet with you to provide some additional information, which we hope you will consider as you prepare to vote on the Keystone Fund this legislative session. With your permission, I would like to bring _____ and _____ who can share a [BUSINESSPERSON'S OR NATURALIST'S OR ENVIRONMENTALIST'S, OR PARK EMPLOYEE'S] perspective on this issue.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your response.

Yours truly,

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]
[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]