



Simple Strategies for Building a Relationship with Your Lawmaker

Meeting with your members of Congress (United States Senators and Representatives) or their aides is a great way to begin to build a relationship with them. It helps them put a name and face to MPS and ML diseases. When MPS and ML are discussed in the legislature, your lawmaker will feel personally connected to this issue because they will remember you and your loved one – who lives in their own home district. No amount of professional lobbying, action alerts or letter writing campaigns can connect your lawmaker to MPS or ML in the way that you can!

Some tips to help you begin to build a relationship with your lawmaker are below:

1. **Be punctual and patient.** Lawmakers have busy schedules and may not be able to meet if you are late. Also, legislators' schedules sometimes run behind, and you may have to wait to meet with them or their staff.
2. **Be flexible and willing to meet with staff.** Even if you are scheduled to meet with your legislator, his/her schedule could change at the last minute and you may end up meeting with one of his/her aides. Do not look or act disappointed. This is still a great opportunity to make your case and start an important relationship. If you hold out to meet directly with the lawmaker him/herself, you may be forever waiting!
3. **Respect time limits.** Legislators and staff generally expect to meet for 15-20 minutes, so keeping your discussion informative but brief will help you meet this timeline.
4. **Be conversational.** Do not feel that you need to be all business! Don't be afraid to chit-chat and talk about current events, local happenings, or other "home state" issues.
5. **Ask questions.** Open-ended questions are a great way to learn more about your lawmaker and gather important information about your advocacy goals.
6. **Share your personal story.** Remember that your personal story will be the most compelling part of your visit. Bring a picture of your child or other loved one with MPS or ML disease, tell your personal story, and convey why MPS/ML-related policy issues are so important to you and your family. Bring a picture of your child/family!
7. **Acknowledge differing opinions.** If your legislator does not agree with you, it is helpful to listen to his/her position. Having an argument will not help build a relationship.
8. **Respond to questions honestly.** If you don't know the answer to a question that a legislator or aide asks, simply respond, "I don't know, but I'll get back to you with an answer." He/she will appreciate that you are giving them the correct information, even if it is after the meeting. Be sure to follow up!

9. **Thank your legislator or their staff.** Thank your legislator and his/her staff for their time when you finish the meeting and follow up with a thank-you note or letter that restates your message and reminds them of your personal story. ***It is also important to thank your legislator for their support if they vote for legislation that benefits MPS diseases.*** This lets them know you are paying attention and appreciate their help!
10. **Follow-up with any additional information.** If your legislator asked a question or requested additional information in the meeting, be sure to get the information to him/her promptly.
11. **Check-in with your legislator periodically.** Maintaining contact with your legislator's office can help you build a relationship. This can be as simple as calling your legislator to provide updates on developments in legislation or other MPS/ML-related news. Even if your legislator has not committed to supporting MPS/ML-related legislation, maintaining a relationship with your legislator's office can help in future work.
12. **Pay attention and be informed.** Read your newspaper, watch the news, and pay attention to what your members of Congress are saying and doing. If you are pleased with something they are doing, drop them an email or make a quick call to thank them. If you disagree, let them know that as well!

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