

Advocacy Tips | Contacting your State Representatives

Federal and State legislators put a lot of weight in what their constituents have to say, especially when they meet with them in their districts. There is a tremendous opportunity for each of our supporters to take BCAN's mission to find a cure for bladder cancer, directly to their Federal representatives.

You can also make a difference by advocating in your state, particularly when there are issues related to medical research or healthcare coverage or services. You can reach out and make your voice and story heard:



In Person – at their offices in Washington or within your state district offices



By phone,



by email, or by



snail mail.

How do I find out who my Federal Representatives are?

Every American is represented in Congress by one Member of Congress, and 2 Senators. Each of these leaders has a webpage that provides their viewpoints on key issues, along with listings of their contact information, and office locations – in Washington and in their districts.

To find your Senator's name, you can go to <http://www.senate.gov/senators/contact> and from there choose your state, and your list of senators will appear. This link will also provide you a list of all 100 US Senators.

To find your Member of Congress, go to www.house.gov/representatives. You can search by State and District or by Last Name near the top of the page. Or you can enter your zip code to locate your Representative in Congress at the top of the page.

You can also call the US Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask them to connect you with your Representative. You may need to provide some additional information such as a zip code or street address so that your individual Member of Congress can be identified.

How do I find out where my legislator's local offices are located?

Each legislator will have their Washington and state offices listed on their website. Some Members of Congress will have multiple district offices and all Senators will have multiple district offices. Senator's webpages can be found either at www.senate.gov, or in the following format: SenatorLastName.senate.gov.

Members of Congress' page can be found at either www.house.gov, or in the following general format MembersLastName.house.gov. Often, when two members have the same last name, their full name is used.

Office locations are often found at the bottom of a legislator's website or is listed in their "contact" section. Each listing should provide you with a full address, and a phone number for each specific office.



How do I schedule a meeting with my representatives?

Having found your legislator and their office, call the office number indicated on their website. When they answer, tell them your name and identify yourself as a constituent during your greeting. In addition, should you have a personal relationship with your legislator, make that known at the front end of the call.

Let them know that you are very interested in the issue(s) related to bladder cancer, and, if you are a survivor, be sure to highlight that fact. Ask for a meeting with the legislator (if they are available and near you) or leave a message, so that you can tell them about your personal story and ask for their support to find a cure for bladder cancer or other specific issues.

For in person meetings:

Ask for, and make sure you have the correct spelling of, the name of the district scheduler, or the District Director if there isn't a designated scheduler. The District Director is the person who oversees the Congressman's district office and often is the one in charge of the schedule. Ask if it would be ok to follow up on email.

At this point, the process becomes the same for both House and Senate staffers. Call the office and ask for the name and email address of the staffer working in the area germane to your issue. Most often, you will be provided with the health Legislative Assistant's information. However, it could also be the staffer responsible for environmental, labor or other issues depending on your specific advocacy issue and the structure of the office.

Follow up your phone call with an email that lists your name, address, phone number, along with a summary of your phone conversation. Include a sentence saying how you are looking forward to the opportunity to meet with your Congressman/Senator. Or how you appreciate the opportunity to send your story to your representative (state or Federal). Also include information as to the range of dates and times you would be able to meet with them. The more flexibility you can offer, the better, given their often-packed schedules.

What do I say in my meeting?

Your voice and your story, is important. Meetings are usually set for 20-30-minute periods of time. This is an opportunity for you to begin a relationship with the person who represents you in Congress.

While each legislator has their own unique personality, everyone likes to be thanked, so open the meeting by introducing yourself, and any individuals you bring with you, and thanking the legislator for their time. Tell them your personal story including how bladder cancer has affected your life and those you know, highlighting your status as their constituent, *and as a supporter of BCAN*. Let them know that you are involved in _____ [insert the topic you want to him/her to address] and ask for their support on that worthy mission. You can mention a few specific places where they can be supportive of our mission.

At the end of the meeting, restate the topics you wish the legislator to support and thank them for their time in meeting with you. Ask if it will be ok for you to follow up and keep the conversation going in the coming weeks and months.



Is the meeting over when I walk out the door?

No. Following your meeting, send a note of thank you, via email or us mail, to the legislator. In that note, be sure to mention the topics you wish them to support again and ask for an update as to what that legislator is doing to address your concerns. Establishing and maintaining an open dialogue with your legislator can go a long way towards getting them to act according to your wishes. Legislators across the country have examples of constituents who they met with, and who keep in touch to pressure them to act, leading to that legislator answering their call to act.

What if the legislator won't/can't meet with me and I meet with a member of staff instead? The staff for a legislator often knows more about the issues and the current legislative status of any given issue, than does the leader. After all, each legislator is expected to be an expert on every issue facing our country, so they rely heavily on their staff. Earning the support and inspiring the passion of a member of a legislator's staff will often lead to that legislator acting. Treat any staff present in, or leading a meeting, with the same respect you would a state or federal legislator. Be sure you get the name, title and email for the legislator's staff member in your state or Washington who is responsible for healthcare and health research. When following up with the meeting, be sure to cc this staffer, who will most likely be the one who directly handles the issue for the legislator.