

2021 Speaking with Your Legislators

It is very important to meet with your representatives and let them know which issues are important to you, after all they are YOUR elected representatives. Here are some tips to prepare for your meetings.

The seven most important words in politics are: "I am your constituent and I vote" -Marc Guimond

Before You Go

- Find out who your representative is:
<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/myrepresentative.aspx>
Click onto the "Full Detail" button for your representatives and see what committees they are on and see what personal information they have posted. Some will post about their hobbies or their family.
- Find out who your Senator is: - <https://www.flsenate.gov/senators/find>
Click on the Senator's name above his picture and there are tabs to the right that will give you some information about his career and information about on which committee(s) he/she serves. These can be great conversation starters. You can also do an internet search and find out other information about them.

Your first meeting should be primarily a friendly introduction to begin to develop a relationship. The FSOMA may have talking points they feel are important as well. If you haven't received any talking points please ask the office. You can e- mail director@fsoma.org

During the legislative session there **may be specific** bills that need mentioning.

*You would need to know:

- The bill number and what does the bill do?
- Where is it in the process?
- Find pertinent information relating to the bill; i.e. If the bill is related to opioids, you can find out how many opioid related deaths in your county last year and include as a talking point.

**Your FSOMA office and lobbyist will have this information and be happy to share.*

For follow up visits it can also just be a casual visit to deepen relationships, or it can be to ask for support. If seeking support:

What's your ask? When you are meeting with legislators it's important to have a clear statement of what you are asking them to do.

Email then follow-up with a phone call to set up an appointment with the legislator. If they are unavailable, ask to meet with their aide. You could have to wait several weeks for an appointment time depending on the time of year.

Currently, as of 2020, Legislators are making virtual appointments. Once a meeting date/time is confirmed, offer to "host" the meeting, but **recognize the legislator's office might have a preferred platform** that you will need to use. For help with setting up a platform (if needed) contact the FSOMA office.

Before the Meeting (if virtual)

Test your Internet connection and/or phone signal by video chatting a family member or friend.

Make sure your background is not distracting. If you are taking the meeting in front of a window, if possible, cover the window so you do not appear as a silhouette on screen. Have lighting in front of you, not behind.

If you live with others, notify them to give you privacy within the timeframe of your meeting.

Write down what you want to say so you can stay on message.

Make your points clear by explaining how your issue impacts the legislator's district and constituents, as well as the region & state.

When possible, discuss the issue from a personal perspective – share your own experiences.

If multiple advocates plan to join the call, assign a leader who will open and close the meeting and keep things running on time.

Before the meeting begins, silence your cell phone and place it out of view.

When you begin the meeting, **ask permission to take a screen shot** of everyone on screen

Ask if **you can post on social media**

At Your Meeting

Dress professionally- as if you are going to a job interview.

Be on time- be patient if you have to wait, remember that they are often working through hundreds of bills in session.

Be prepared- your presentation should be brief, concise, and accurate. You don't need to include every detail you may know about the issue; keep it basic and focus on the most important points. Offer more information if they are interested.

Be polite, friendly and interested- show that you are interested in the member's perspective, and that you respect the member's right to disagree, if they do. Offer information to counter their opposing views without becoming argumentative. Do not threaten.

Tell them where you are from, especially important if you are their constituent.

If they ask for more info, be sure to provide it after the meeting.

If this is your first meeting with your Rep- This is just about making contact and building rapport.

Be polite, be personable, tell them about yourself and your practice. Ask if they have ever had acupuncture (DO NOT offer a free treatment). Feel free to bring in some patient testimonials (or even a patient if they are from the same district).

Who are you? Are you a voter in their district? You may also be a business owner. As an acupuncturist you will most likely be treating patients in their district also. It can be very powerful to say something like *"I own a business in (name your county), and I am an acupuncturist that treats painful conditions every day without opioids"*.

If you are there to discuss pending legislation- Tell them the Bill number, what the bill does, where it is in process, and why you want them to support.

Ask how the legislator stands and let them (or aide) talk, don't interrupt. Listen and try to find out what the legislator thinks. If the legislator supports your position, ask for advice. If not,

discuss briefly your own reasons for supporting or opposing the bill. Speak from the heart and give examples.

Ask for support or assistance- request specific support or assistance for your position. If you leave with their commitment, great! If you leave without a commitment, try to find out what additional information they need for a decision.

Give them your business card and get their card and email address. Also ask for their staff members card. Save this information in your contact list for future communications.

Let them know that you want to be a resource for them on any healthcare related legislation. You can tell them you are a member of FSOMA and leave contact information for FSOMA for any future questions as well.

Thank the legislator (or aide) for their time! If you receive a commitment, thank them for that as well. You want to leave the legislator with a friendly feeling and the way open for another meeting.

Things to Avoid

Don't be afraid to admit if you don't know something. Don't give information or quote statistics you're not sure of. Offer to research and get back to the legislators with answers.

Don't wing it if you're unsure of the facts, it's too easy to lose credibility.

Don't make any elected official or staff member look bad or bad mouth other elected officials.

After Your Meeting

Follow up with a Thank You email or note within 7 days of visit. Follow up with any additional information requested or promised. Track the progress of current bills online.

Let other APs know about your experience. Offer to go along with a colleague if they are nervous to go alone.

Send the FSOMA office a picture of you with your legislator (or aid). They are used to getting their picture taken.