



## ADVOCACY TOOLBOX

### Attending a Town Hall Meeting

Town Hall meetings are used by members of Congress (MOC) to “take the pulse” of their district. They provide MOCs a forum to interact with constituents and to quickly and easily gauge how voters feel about pressing issues and pending legislation. Town Hall meetings are also a great opportunity for MOCs to learn about issues that may be flying under the radar or not getting attention in the media.

Unfortunately, Town Hall meetings happen much less often than they once did. But if your MOC is holding one, then attending is a great way to bring awareness to an issue important to you. Follow the tips below to give yourself the best chance of breaking through and making a positive impact with your MOC.

**Be Prepared.** Most people that attend town hall meetings are not well prepared. They stand up and shout or ramble. An individual that speaks in an even tone and has prepared a well-researched and rehearsed statement, question or story with a clear message will elicit a thoughtful response from the MOC.

**Tell A Personal Story.** Personal stories are the strongest form of advocacy because they (done correctly) evoke emotion and easily sum up a policy issue in a way that is easily relatable and can be shared with others. Personal stories have the ability to break through the noise of politics and put a human face on issues often dominated by impersonal numbers and cold facts, figures, charts and graphs.

**Be Respectful.** Civility in politics has declined dramatically over the last few years, but being polite and respectful can be incredibly powerful in getting your point across to an MOC in a public setting. Becoming aggressive with an MOC will immediately put him or her in a defensive position and make persuading them to see your point of view that much more difficult.

**Strength in Numbers.** Add weight to the importance of your issue by having other like-minded individuals join you at the town hall meeting to express similar support or opposition. MOCs pay close attention to how many people have the same or similar problems, issues or suggestions.

**Interact with Staff.** District staff act as the MOC's eyes and ears on the ground and constituent relations and information gathering are prime responsibilities for these individuals. Most people attending a town hall event will ignore the young man or woman standing in the corner typing away on an iPhone and instead focus on the MOC but talking with this person and building a relationship with them will give your advocacy efforts a dramatic boost. Introduce yourself, share your story, get their business card and stay in touch.

**Bring a Leave-Behind.** There is a chance you may not get the opportunity to speak when attending a town hall event, or if you do speak the MOC or staff may ask you if you have any additional materials. Be prepared for these possibilities by bringing a one-page summary of why you are there, your personal story, why your MOC should care/how your issue impacts the district and how you want your MOC to address the issue. Short and simple is good, bullet points are best.

**Follow Up.** Following up a town hall event appearance with an office meeting or phone call with district staff is a great way to continue a dialogue with the MOC's office, build relationships and collectively work toward a solution to your issue. This follow up is especially important if your story caught their attention and they have asked for additional materials or information. Doing so demonstrates that you are a reliable source of information and serious about your issue.

**Coordinate a Larger Effort.** Bring greater attention to your issue by working with colleagues, employees, friends and/or family to attend multiple town hall events throughout your district. Multiple people at the same town hall event with the same issue will grab your MOC's attention, but multiple people at multiple town hall events with the same issue will make that issue stand out to your MOC even more.

**Thank Them.** After every interaction with your MOC, thank them. MOCs spend most of their day being asked to solve problems, being pulling in different directions and often being unappreciated by those they represent. Thanking them and letting them know you appreciate their efforts, or the time they took to speak or meet with you, will go a long way in developing mutual rapport and respect between you and your MOC.