

## Ideas for Working with Your Legislators

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Local Leagues are a critical link between the legislation that LWVMA supports or opposes and the state legislators who decide the fate of that legislation.

LWVMA's Legislative Action Committee urges local Leagues to get to know their legislators, including committees they serve on and bills they are sponsoring and co-sponsoring. This information is readily available at <https://malegislature.gov/>. Just type your city or town into the "Find a Legislator" box and all your legislators will appear. Click on each to determine committees and sponsoring legislation.

### *Ways to meet with legislators*

**Attend LWVMA Day on the Hill and pre-arrange meetings with your legislators** in advance. Do not expect legislators to be able to meet with you as a drop-in. When you arrange the meeting or send a reminder about it, make sure the legislator has received the Day on the Hill packet that LWVMA sends to all of them.

**Arrange a meeting between your members and legislators.** Consider making a "legislative breakfast or coffee" a yearly event for all your members. Plan the date well in advance. Legislators tend to be most available on Mondays and Fridays for in-district meetings. Avoid legislator meetings during the election season if an incumbent is running in a contested race.

Another option is to invite your legislators to a meeting for a specific purpose. Be aware of their time constraints and let them know in advance why you wish to meet.

Invite legislators to your League's events such as forums and celebrations. If you have invited a legislator from outside your district to speak at a forum, you could ask your representative to introduce her/him or have a role in the Q+A period.

Give your legislators an opportunity to recognize the League with a citation for a special event such as an anniversary or other celebration. With advance notice to legislative aides, such awards can easily be arranged.

**Meet with a legislator shared with other Leagues.** It is also very effective to hold a joint session with other Leagues who share a senator or representative. This allows for a larger group of people to attend and illustrates the "oneness" of the League.

**Attend your legislator's pre-announced office hours.** Many legislators hold pre-announced in-district drop-in office hours at a public location several times a year, open to any constituent. The legislator or an aide will attend, and if you want to specifically request

the legislator be there, call her/his office. Come prepared to discuss LWVMA supported or opposed legislation, which you can find at [www.lwvma.org](http://www.lwvma.org).

**Attend your legislators' open district meetings.** Some, but not all, legislators hold a regularly-scheduled open meeting for all constituents. It is worthwhile to have a League presence at these meetings, although discussing specific legislation might be difficult in this large setting with limited time for open discussion. It is a good time to make general points on areas you think the legislator should focus on, for example, open records, housing, public transportation or civic education. League positions should be your guide if you are speaking for the League.

### ***Preparing for your meeting***

In preparation for meetings with legislators, access the LWVMA website, [www.lwvma.org](http://www.lwvma.org), to determine what legislation you want to discuss, and let the legislators know in advance. The LWVMA website also includes testimony for most of the legislation. Any of these written testimonies can be printed and handed to your legislators. You may give them information on several bills, but it is probably best to focus on a small number of interests to your League members.

If you are meeting to discuss a specific bill, be especially aware of where that legislation is in the process (joint committee, House or Senate Ways and Means Committee, scheduled for full Senate or house vote). To find the status of a bill, go to [www.malegislature.gov](http://www.malegislature.gov) and type the bill number into the search box. When the bill comes up, click on the title which takes you to a full report on the bill, including "bill history," which gives current status. If it is in a joint committee or Ways and Means, determine if your legislator is on the relevant committee and whether she/he plans to vote the legislation out of committee. The LWVMA LAC can give guidance on this.

If you meet your legislators, alone or in a group, after Day on the Hill, you can use the Day on the Hill packet for reference, in addition to what is posted on LWVMA's website. If you are meeting early in the legislative session, you can give legislators an opportunity to outline their goals for the session and state their committees and chairmanships.

Although the above focuses on state legislation, there may be local issues that you want to address with your legislator. Here, your local League positions can guide you.

### ***Holding the meeting***

One or two people should facilitate the meeting. If specific bills will be discussed, having an informed spokesperson for each gives more voices a chance to be heard. Remember, unless your legislator is on a relevant committee or is a co-sponsor of a bill, she/he may have no knowledge of the bill. This is your chance to educate and persuade.

Some League members may come with an agenda, often her/his pet legislation. If that bill has not been approved by LWVMA, the facilitator should say so and ask the member to discuss it outside of this meeting. It is helpful to state this up front as well.

Arrange the meeting to enable face-to-face contact, such as around a table or in a circle. A classroom-style setup may make discussion more difficult, but can work.

You could follow up with the meeting with a letter to the editor of the local paper thanking your legislators for meeting with you. This simple gesture is much appreciated by the legislators.

**For more information on lobbying and on how the legislative process works, take a look at the 2013 League Advocacy booklet on our website [<https://lwwma.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Advocacy-Booklet2013.pdf>]**