



ADSWatchSM

ADVOCACY IN ACTION



Sharing Your Story

- Keep it simple. You'll have limited time in the room and a big message to share.
- People will remember how you made them feel. The talking points are important, but you can humanize them by sharing your story and grounding the talking points in what they mean for you, your district, or state. Staffers and members take dozens of meetings every week, so they're more likely to remember our issues if they can remember a personal anecdote you shared about why this issue matters to you.
- Do what feels right. Sharing your story is vulnerable. You get to decide what to share and when. If you don't feel safe sharing your story, simply move on to another topic.

What might this look like in a meeting?

“My name is Jo, and I am from Columbus, Ohio. I am here because the Ryan White program saved my life. I want the elected officials who represent my state to know how important Ryan White is to ending the HIV epidemic and why it should be funded at \$3.130 billion. [Share your story about how Ryan White services helped you care for your health]”

Advocating for Our Issues

Preparing for Meetings

- Connect your story to policy asks.
 - Members of Congress and their staffers need to hear how their votes translate into tangible impact on people's lives. Remember that our legislators are in office to serve US.
- Make a plan with your group.
 - Determine the flow of the meeting/who is saying what
 - If you are new to advocating on the hill, make sure you tell your team lead so they can provide you with the proper support
 - Meetings generally follow the same structure: a quick round of introductions, making the ask, sharing your story, and then repeating your ask.
 - Mental Health/Emotional Safety
 - If you need a break or feel uncomfortable meeting with a specific office, we'll have staff in the Rayburn Cafeteria (House side) and Dirksen Cafeteria (Senate side) so you can sit somewhere and/or decompress.
 - Know the member of Congress' background
 - For legislators, you may want to look at their official website, recent news/press, positions on policy priorities, previous voting records on legislation, HIV-related bills they have sponsored, issues they are passionate about, etc.
- Expect the unexpected.
 - What will happen if the meeting doesn't go how you planned?
 - Meetings can go well or poorly – regardless of the member of Congress's stance on our issues
 - If a meeting doesn't feel right, leave behind the advocacy materials and exit safely. You can say, “I believe this is a great place to end our meeting today. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. Have a good day.”

Responding in the Moment

Even if you know how your member of Congress feels about our legislative asks, your Hill meeting might go differently than you expect. You might meet with a staffer who is familiar with these issues and is passionate about supporting our communities. You might meet with a staffer who shows open disdain.

Take some time beforehand to talk through how your state team might respond. How might you capitalize on the moment and foster a new legislative champion? How would you excuse yourself so you can safely exit a meeting? How would you redirect the conversation back to our issues and asks?

During the Meetings

- Breathe.
 - You, regardless of who you are, absolutely deserve to be in the room – our members of Congress are here to listen to you, and you are the expert of your own story.
- Don't sweat the details.
 - If a staffer asks you something you don't know, tell them you will get back to them with an answer as part of your follow-up. Please flag for your team lead and include it in your meeting notes. (e.g., “I am not sure how to answer your question, but if I can grab your information at the end of this meeting, I can have someone from AIDSWatch follow up with more details and resources.”)
- Be careful of assumptions!
 - During the meeting, you will most likely be meeting with a staffer instead of the actual member of Congress. Staffers may or may not be educated about our issue, so be ready to share the basics.

After the Meetings

Regardless of how the meeting went, it was already a success. You marched up to your member of Congress's office and shared your story. Having the courage to share your truth to people in power is no small feat — be proud of yourself!

- Practice self-care.
 - It's important to check in emotionally after your meeting – did it go the way you thought it would? Do you feel seen/heard? It can be triggering and emotionally taxing to go through these meetings. We encourage folks to take a break and take care of yourselves, as needed.
- Don't let this be the last time they hear from you!
 - Be sure to follow up with the member of Congress and staffers, thanking them for the meeting, reiterating any asks, and providing any additional information requested during the meeting, if applicable.
 - Have follow-up meetings and develop relationships with staffers, as the most talked-about issues get attention.
 - Make sure you post about your experience, tag the Member, and use the hashtag #AIDSWatch2026!
- Connect with your state group and continue the advocacy back home.
- Efforts to end the HIV epidemic cannot be achieved through federal action alone. Keep up the momentum of AIDSWatch by working with your state group on local advocacy efforts back home!