

How to Talk to Your Elected Officials

Lobbying visits allow you to engage with your legislators and tell them about the important issues affecting you and your community. A visit with your legislator is a perfect opportunity to share key information and local stories that can inform a legislator's position.

The steps of a visit:

- Introduce yourself (name, town and organizational affiliation, if applicable)
- Thank your legislator and/or legislative staff for taking the time to meet with you. If you already know they support a bill or issue that you care about, thank them.
- State your purpose, “We requested this meeting because we would like to discuss a few bills and budget line items that are important for protecting and preserving river health.”
- Briefly tell your personal stories/motivations that explain why you support these bills. Did your local river or stream go dry in 2016? Has poor water quality harmed your ability to swim, fish, or kayak your local stream or river? Address how these issues have affected your city/town/region if possible. It’s also fine to say something more general, like “I really care about the environment, and with federal support for the environment going away, it’s important to me that we have good protection at the state level.”
- Hand the legislator and/or staff any relevant informational sheets and make your requests, “We would like to ask for your support for this legislation and these budget amendments to protect our rivers in Massachusetts.” Note: Most legislators will need time to consider your input and will not take a position during your meeting.
- If your legislator disagrees with your position, be respectful and firm. Ask for the basis for his/her opposition. If you cannot provide information refuting his/her points, ask him/her for the opportunity to follow up your conversation with more information.
- Thank them for their time and tell them that you are counting on them to champion water issues this legislative session.

DO

- Identify yourself and where you live.
- Address your representative or senator using their title.
- Refer to the bill title and bill number if possible.
- Stay on message.
- Take notes or mark down any specific feedback, questions, or concerns that arise during a meeting so Mass Rivers can follow-up with them later.

DON'T

- Read from the paper. Instead, try and have a conversation with your legislator.
- Make up an answer to a question you don’t know. Instead say, “I do not know the answer to that question but I would be happy to get back to you or your staff later with an answer.”
- Argue with legislators who disagree with our legislation - thank them for listening to you and express hope that they will continue to review the documents you’ve provided and reconsider their stance in the future.