



How to Conduct an Effective Lobby Visit

Unlike most states that have legalized cannabis for adult use, Maryland lacks a voter initiative process. In the Free State, only state lawmakers have the power to replace prohibition with thoughtful regulation. (However, Maryland lawmakers could put a state constitutional amendment before voters.) That means meeting your state legislators and expressing your views is one of the most effective ways to influence policy. Your legislators' job is to represent their constituents, and they are very interested in where their constituents stand on issues affecting the state.

State legislative districts are relatively small, and even one voice can have a profound impact. MPP's federal lobbyist, Don Murphy, was a law-and-order Republican state lawmaker in Maryland when a veteran with cancer approached him. That visit took him from having no real interest in cannabis policy to introducing a medical cannabis bill that later became law. Now, Don's career is devoted to improving marijuana policies.

While not every lobbying visit is transformative, effective constituent advocacy has a huge impact. Below you will find a list of tips to keep in mind if you wish to visit your elected officials to discuss regulating cannabis for adults. Take these tips to heart, and you'll find that any meeting with your legislators, even if they disagree with your stance, can be productive and informative.

Tip #1: Professionalism, professionalism, professionalism

This cannot be stressed enough. Be respectful and professional in all ways. Dress professionally. Be on time for your meeting, and watch your rhetoric. Do not use slang for "cannabis." Do not disparage political parties, the government, or politicians. Do not wear anything with cannabis images on it — they distract from your policy arguments.

Tip #2: Stay on topic

Since you are lobbying for marijuana to be legalized, taxed, and regulated for adults 21 and older, you should not bring up other issues. You should have a specific, concrete request, such as cosponsoring a bill to legalize marijuana for adult use.

Tip #3: Prepare

Before you make an appointment(s), please contact info@marylandcannabispolicy.org to let us know. Please include your state legislators' names, which you can look up [here](#). We can often let you know which of your state legislators is the most important to meet with.

Know the issue. Take the time to read over talking points and responses to common concerns provided [here](#). These talking points have proven to be effective arguments when advocating for taxing and regulating marijuana for adults. If you don't know the answer to a question, do not make up answers. Email the legislator later to follow up. You can write info@marylandcannabispolicy.org if you need help answering a question.

Tip #4: Know the legislator

You can find your legislators and their biographies [here](#). This can give you some valuable insight into their background and political platforms. Knowing this, you can better prepare your arguments to address specific concerns of the legislator, and you can find out if you have a connection with the lawmaker — such as an alma mater or church.

Tip #5: Bring informational handouts

Feel free to print and bring an appropriate amount of any helpful information you may find [here](#). Do not overload your representatives with papers, but a succinct handout or two will allow them to further examine the issue after your visit.

Tip #6: Be concise and do not waste time

Legislators are very busy people, especially during sessions. Keep this in mind. It is encouraged to engage in some initial getting-to-know-you conversation, but move the conversation along to the issue at hand as soon as the opportunity presents itself.

Tip #7: Do not get mad

Your representatives may not agree with you; do not let this anger you. Also, you may end up meeting with staff as opposed to the actual legislator. Again, do not let this throw you. Anger is unproductive. Respectfully disagreeing and countering accusations with fact-based arguments is a better way to have your voice heard. Never talk over the legislator or staffer and do not get combative. Many legislators come around on marijuana policy issues after further examination, but hostility will reduce their chances of doing so. However your legislator may initially feel about the issue, it will be far better served if they see you as an informed, rational, and polite advocate for it.

Tip #8: Relax and enjoy yourself

Have fun. Legislators are typically friendly and outgoing people; it's hard to win an election otherwise. Smile and present yourself as a concerned citizen, regardless of whether you support the legislator. If

you are relaxed, friendly, and confident, you will find the conversation flows better, and you'll get your points across more accurately.

Tip #9: Follow up

Regardless of how the meeting goes or the legislator's stance on the issue, always follow up the meeting with a thank you card or email. If the legislator or staffer said they would get back to you on a question, be sure to follow up politely to request an answer. Additionally, if your legislator asked any questions you could not initially answer, remember to provide succinct answers to those questions.

Please also let us know how the meeting went at info@marylandcannabispolicy.org.