

How to **talk** to your legislators

A practical guide to making our voices heard



Connecting with your elected officials about AAUW issues is a great way to develop a relationship and influence the positions they take on issues that are important to you. Use this guide to help you at every step of the way. If you have questions that aren't answered in this guide, reach out to your branch president or AAUW-TN Public Policy Chair, Peggy Swann, at PeggySwann@gmail.com.

Making your appointment

Email the legislator's office to request an appointment in advance, and **follow up** on this request with a phone call.

Be specific about the purpose of the meeting: which issue you want to discuss, a **bill number** if applicable, and that you are an **AAUW member**.

Timing is everything! Make sure you meet with your elected official to talk about an issue before that particular issue goes to a vote. Check the tn.gov calendar to stay up to date. wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/schedule/

Be prepared to meet with a staffer if your legislator is unavailable.

Preparing for your appointment

Know who your legislators are before you contact them. **Do your homework** on your elected official's position and voting history on the issues. If possible, reach out to develop a relationship with your legislator and his or her office.

Organize your thoughts before you call or email your legislator and make notes of **talking points** to keep yourself on track.

Prepare a **one-page fact sheet** concerning your issue to give to your legislator. **AAUW's Quick Facts** is a great example. aauw.org/resource/quick-facts-on-the-gender-pay-gap/

Tips & tricks for during the meeting

If you are a **constituent**, tell them so. Legislators want to know what their constituents think.

Tell your senator or representative what effect you think a particular bill, if it becomes law, will have on you, your children, your business, or your community. **Personal stories** from constituents will go a long way toward persuading an elected official.

Be **concise** but **specific**. Discuss only **one issue** at a time. Bringing up many issues in one meeting can be overwhelming and leave a weaker impression.

Make a clear ask for sponsorship of a measure, a vote on a bill, or other requests. **Suggest a course of action** and offer assistance.

Respect the official and the office. **Be polite**, even if you disagree strongly.

Remain **nonpartisan** when representing AAUW. Engage with candidates and elected officials from all parties. Work on issues guided by AAUW's mission and values.

Ask your elected officials to pose for **photographs** with you and your group. You can share these photos on social media! Consider bringing an AAUW sign to hold in these photos.

Thank your legislator for meeting with you and **follow up** after the meeting. Sending a **personalized thank-you note** is great practice.

What NOT to do

DON'T make promises or threats.
DON'T overstay your welcome.
DON'T disparage government or politics.
DO be courteous, but **DON'T** apologize for your point of view.

Things to keep in mind

There are no permanent friends or permanent enemies. While you may disagree with your legislator on one issue, you may well end up working with that legislator on another.

Give this task the **time and effort** you give other important tasks.

If your elected officials ask questions you can't answer, let them know that you'll **follow up with them.** Contact the AAUW national office at Policy@AAUW.org for assistance with tough questions.

If you can't make it to Capitol Hill, try meeting with your elected officials in their **district offices** when the General Assembly is not in session.

Resources

Find your legislators wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/fml/districts.aspx

Find out when committees meet and when bills go to the floor wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/schedule/

The difference between "political" and "partisan" aauw.org/resource/political-vs-partisan-guide/

Quick facts on the gender pay gap aauw.org/resource/quick-facts-on-the-gender-pay-gap/

Action Network sign up aauw.org/what-we-do/public-policy/two-minute-activist/



Making Tennessee a better place for women and girls to work and learn since 1926 aauw-tn.aauw.net

Advocating as a group

You can visit your legislator alone, in a group of **AAUW members**, or as a member of a **coalition** of organizations with similar values.

Consider bringing people who **represent the constituency** affected by your issue.

Make sure **members of the group have specific roles** and know what their roles are. For example, one member might bring up talking points, another may make the ask, and a third may ask for a photo op.

Alert the media! If you recruit a large group, the local networks may be interested in the story of your legislative visit.

Writing to your elected officials

Double check spelling, especially of your legislator's name.

Sign your name clearly and **provide correct contact information** so your representative can respond.

Keep all written correspondence **brief and concise**—no more than one page.

Identify your issue at the beginning of the letter, and only write about **one issue** for each letter.

Back up your opinions with **facts and figures.**

Avoid acronyms, abbreviations, and technical jargon.

If you are contacting more than one legislator, **personalize** each message to that individual.

Calling your elected officials

Follow the same tips for in person meetings, paying special attention to **concise talking points and brevity.**

Be prepared to leave a message with a staffer. Leave your name and contact information.

Make sure you're signed up for **AAUW Action Network.** You'll receive **Action Alert** emails when immediate action is needed to call your elected officials on specific legislation.