

## Tips for Successful Congressional Visits

Thank you for advocating on behalf of imperiled wildlife – in the U.S. and your community – and the Endangered Species Act (ESA)! While in DC, you will be meeting with either your members of Congress themselves, or, more likely, their environmental staff. These staffers are the eyes and ears of each congressional office regarding any environmental issue. They educate their boss on hot topics and let them know what issues their constituents care about—and what we want them to do about it.

While a member of Defenders’ staff will be present with you at each of your meetings, you (the constituent!) are in control of the meeting! Here are some helpful tips to ensure success.

**MAKE SPECIFIC ASKS:** You want to ensure each congressional office knows why you came to meet with them. Practice starting the conversation with your name, city, and state, followed by: “I’m here to talk to you about a few wildlife issues that I care deeply about, including opposing H.R. 1897, the ESA Amendments Act of 2025.”

**TELL YOUR STORY:** You are a voting constituent, and you have their ear! Use this time to let them know why wildlife is important to you, your district, or your state. Personal stories can really influence the way members of Congress view an issue, and they meet with constituents to better understand the values of communities in their district/state. Write down your message ahead of time utilizing the “Personal Story Worksheet.” The worksheet will help guide you through drafting a “rap” that includes your intro, personal story, talking points, and the specific asks. This worksheet is tremendously helpful to get your thoughts in order and visualize how you will deliver your message. **Remember: you do not need to be an expert on these issues.**

**PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETINGS:** Familiarize yourself with the topline talking points, highlight the messaging that resonates with you, and review the background documents and articles. You don’t need to mention every bit of background information we give to you – just a few talking points on each of the issues to help explain why your member of Congress should care. Practice saying your topline talking points and personal narrative aloud. The more you practice, the more confident you’ll be meeting with a congressional office. You are welcome to have written notes, an outline, or note cards with you during the meetings to help keep you on track.

**LISTEN & LEARN:** Your job is to let your members of Congress know their constituents care about the ESA. But these meetings are also an opportunity to gather intel from the offices to help Defenders and other conservation organizations better understand each member’s position and how best to work with them moving forward. Feel free to jot down any notes regarding their responses to the issues and asks. Even a seemingly standard comment may be extremely useful to our lobby team. Don’t be afraid to ask them questions (especially if the staff member isn’t saying much). Draw them out with questions such as:

- Are you familiar with threats to our wildlife populations?
- What are you hearing from constituents about this issue?
- Will you oppose the ESA Amendments Act of 2025?

**BE FLEXIBLE:** Capitol Hill can be a hectic and unpredictable place. Meeting times may change, members and staff run late, and you may discover you’re meeting in the lobby, hallway, or conference room. This is all okay and pretty normal! Go with the flow and have fun with it. You’ve done your homework and are in control!

**DON’Ts:** And finally, what you *should not* do in meetings.

- 1) Never lie or make anything up. If you don’t know the answer to a question, simply say “let me get back to you on that,” write down their question and follow-up after the meeting.
- 2) Don’t be rude. Meetings can be challenging if you do not agree with a member or their staff but it’s imperative to always be professional and respectful.