



# GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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**FARE**

Food Allergy Research & Education

Dear Advocate,

FARE Advocacy is engaged on policy issues important to the food allergy community at all levels of government—federal, state and municipal.

And at all levels of government, the quality of constituent communication is what wins policy debates. It's that simple.

That means we need your help to pass laws that will improve the lives of the 32 million Americans living with food allergies!

We need you to help us by communicating directly with decision makers—to not only deliver our message points but, more importantly, to tell your story about how our issues affect your life.

Your stories move votes. This toolkit is a step-by-step storytelling guide.

We discuss how to tell your story by:

- **Organizing in-person meetings.** Every survey of elected officials says the same thing: Meetings are the most persuasive way for constituents to communicate. We provide instructions for planning, scheduling, executing, and following-up on a meeting with an elected official or staff member.
- **Writing a personal letter.** Most organizations ignore the mail. So we won't! Because they don't receive much mail, writing a personal letter and mailing it to your legislator's office will grab their attention. We walk through the steps on how to write a short, impactful letter and get it to the right office location.
- **Making a phone call.** Phone calls are the quickest way to make sure a legislator understands your position. They're especially important right before a vote.
- **Writing an op-ed or letter to the editor.** Legislators pay close attention to the issues that are being talked about in the news outlets that cover their district. Op-eds and letters to the editor help us raise the profile of food allergy issues and build public support.
- **Communicating via social media.** Especially at the federal level, Facebook and Twitter are growing in their importance. But as more advocates use these channels, it's harder to get noticed. We walk you through the basics of making sure our message stands out.

Whichever way you choose to tell your story, please know it will make a difference.

You can find more information about FARE Advocacy and how you can help at [www.foodallergy.org/take-action/how-advocate](http://www.foodallergy.org/take-action/how-advocate).

If you're interested in learning about other ways you can help FARE Advocacy in your community, please contact Jon Hoffman at [jhoffman@foodallergy.org](mailto:jhoffman@foodallergy.org).

Thank you,



Jon Hoffman  
Director, Grassroots Advocacy



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# FARE ADVOCACY MEETING PLANNING CHECKLIST

## 1. CALL THE LEGISLATOR'S DISTRICT OFFICE CLOSEST TO YOUR HOME TO REQUEST A MEETING TIME

- Follow-up your call with a written request
- Follow-up periodically until the office provides a meeting time

## 2. WORK WITH THE FARE ADVOCACY TEAM TO REACH OUT TO OTHER LOCAL ADVOCATES TO FIND MEETING ATTENDEES

- The Advocacy Team will work with you to send follow up emails, as needed, to generate as many attendees as possible

## 3. REVIEW MEETING MATERIALS FARE PROVIDES

- Review issue talking points (provided by the FARE Advocacy Team)
- Review the sample meeting agenda
- Prepare to deliver the information in half the time, just in case

## 4. IF OTHER ADVOCATES ARE ATTENDING, COORDINATE WITH THEM VIA EMAIL

- Confirm date, time and location of the meeting
- One week prior to the meeting, confirm a final attendee count and report it to the legislator's office

## 5. EXECUTE YOUR MEETING

- Arrive 10-15 minutes early
- Listen to and engage the legislator or their staff in the discussion
- If you don't have an answer to a question, don't worry! Commit to following up with the answers after the meeting.
- Take a group picture

## 6. FOLLOW-UP ON YOUR MEETING

- Send a thank you note to the legislator and any staff member in attendance
- Send your meeting feedback form to the FARE Advocacy Team
- If there were any questions requiring follow up, reach out to the FARE Advocacy Team to discuss and report the answer back to the legislator's office





## SCHEDULING IN-DISTRICT LEGISLATOR MEETINGS

### 1. FIND CONTACT INFORMATION FOR YOUR CONGRESSPEOPLE AND THEIR STAFF:

- House Members:  
<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Senate Members:  
[https://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](https://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)

On each legislator's website, they will provide district office information. Find the phone number for the district office closest to your home.

### 2. CALL THE LEGISLATOR'S DISTRICT OFFICE TO SCHEDULE YOUR MEETING

- Ask for the scheduler.
- Introduce yourself as a constituent (and/or personal friend, donor, etc.) and a FARE Advocate.
- Clearly state your request: a 30-minute, personal meeting with the legislator in his/her district office.
- Outline the purpose for your meeting and the issue you will be discussing: For example: Co-sponsoring the FASTER Act (H.R. 2117/S. 3451).
- Email a written letter of request within 24 hours of your first call.
- Be persistent but polite. If you don't receive any feedback within a week, follow-up with additional calls, but remember that the scheduler is busy balancing several tasks for the legislator.
- Be courteous and patient. The scheduler may be more willing to find room for your meeting if the member's schedule changes. Or, you can ask to meet with the legislator before or after a community event they're attending.

### 3. PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING

- FARE will provide talking points and a leave behind prior to the meeting date.
- Briefly rehearse how you plan to present your information using the talking points, leave behind and, most importantly, personal stories.
- Be prepared to do a shorter version. Think about what you'll say if you only have half the time.



## LETTER TO SCHEDULER TEMPLATE

[PREFIX] [SCHEDULER NAME]  
[ADDRESS1]  
[ADDRESS2]  
[CITY], [STATE] [ZIP]

Dear [SCHEDULER NAME]:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me over the phone on **[DATE]** about scheduling a meeting with **[NAME OF LEGISLATOR]** at **[HIS/HER]** district office.

I look forward to meeting with **[NAME of LEGISLATOR]** to discuss **[DESCRIBE ISSUE]**.

I appreciate your prompt response to my scheduling request. I can be reached by phone at **[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]** or by email at **[YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]**.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to our meeting.

**[YOUR NAME]**

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## SAMPLE LEGISLATOR MEETING AGENDA

### 1. INTRODUCTIONS AND PURPOSE OF MEETING . . . . .2 MINUTES

- Remember to include that you're a constituent and FARE Advocate
- Confirm 30-minute timeframe

### 2. TELL YOUR STORY, INCLUDING YOUR CONNECTION TO FOOD ALLERGIES . . . . .10 MINUTES

### 3. REVIEW THE ISSUE . . . . .10 MINUTES

- Utilize talking points

### 4. ASK LEGISLATOR TO CO-SPONSOR THE FASTER ACT . . . . .5 MINUTES

- If legislator is non-committal, tell him/her that you'll follow-up
- If there are questions you can't answer, pledge to find the answers and follow-up after the meeting

### 5. CONFIRM NEXT STEPS . . . . .3 MINUTES

**Before you leave, remember to:**

- Thank the legislator and staff member(s) for their time
- Provide copies of the leave behind
- Take a picture with the legislator



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## TIPS FOR MEETING EXECUTION AND FOLLOW-UP

### MEETING DAY

- Arrive 10–15 minutes early to your meeting.
- One FARE Advocacy attendee should take notes, if possible.
- Listen to and engage the legislator or their staff in the discussion. Work-in the talking points when it's appropriate. You don't need to memorize the points or say them in a specific order.
- **Remember, your personal story is the most important message!**
- Be respectful of time and attempt to stay on subject.
- If you don't have an answer to a question, don't worry! Commit to following up with the answers after the meeting.
- Remember to ask for your legislator's verbal commitment to support our issue.
- Take a group picture.

### MEETING FOLLOW-UP

- Promptly send thank you notes to your legislator and, if appropriate, staff. Remember to summarize what you discussed and repeat your request for support in your letter.
- Provide the results of your meeting to the FARE Advocacy staff by emailing a summary (and any outstanding questions) to Jon Hoffman at [jhoffman@foodallergy.org](mailto:jhoffman@foodallergy.org) and Jeramie Irwin at [jirwin@foodallergy.org](mailto:jirwin@foodallergy.org).





# LEGISLATOR MEETING FEEDBACK

1. Please provide the name of each meeting attendee.

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2. When and where was your meeting held?

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3. Please provide a summary of your conversation. Be sure to note the legislator's feedback on your support request. (If you have a photo from your meeting, please send it with this form.)

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4. Did the legislator ask questions for which you need to provide answers? If so, please list them.

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5. Is there anything our campaign team or lobbyists should mention in our follow-up conversations with this legislator?

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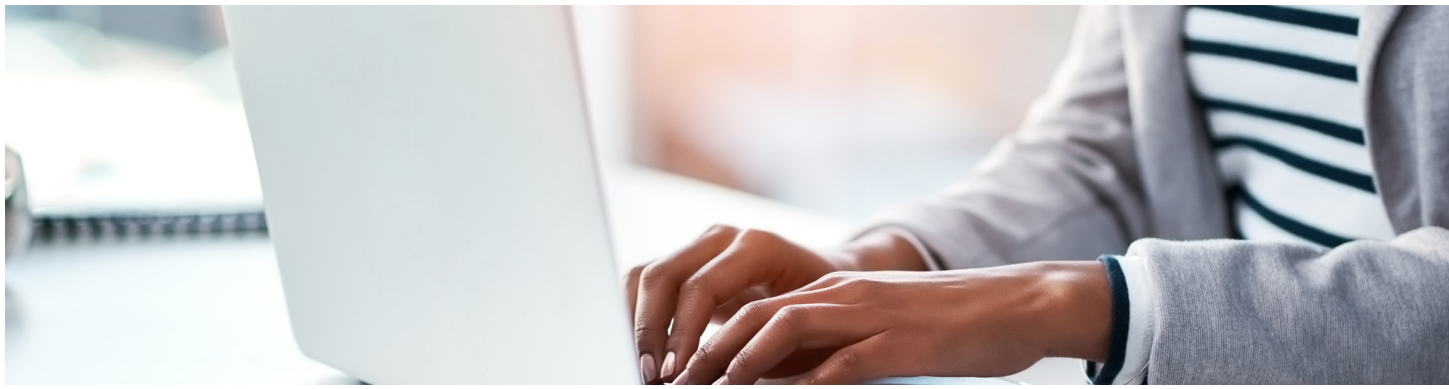
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If you have any questions, please forward them to Jon Hoffman at [jhoffman@foodallergy.org](mailto:jhoffman@foodallergy.org) and Jeramie Irwin at [jirwin@foodallergy.org](mailto:jirwin@foodallergy.org).

**Thank you again for coordinating this meeting!**

Please remember to send a thank you note to the legislator and other meeting attendees.



## WRITING AN OP-ED OR LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### 1. ASSEMBLE YOUR CONTENT

- FARE will provide talking points and background materials on the issue.
- Be prepared to connect your personal story to the issue. How does it affect your life with food allergies?
- Prepare to end your letter by calling on your legislator to support the issue and/or take a specific action.

### 2. RESEARCH YOUR NEWSPAPERS

- Research your local papers to find the best targets for publication.
- Be sure to choose a paper whose circulation includes at least part of your targeted legislator's district.
- If a paper has covered the issue recently, you have a better chance of your letter being published.
- Typically, the smaller the publication's circulation, the easier it is to get your letter printed.
- Confirm the paper's submission requirements and word count limits.

### 3. DRAFT, REVIEW, AND SUBMIT YOUR LETTER

- Keep your letter brief. Abide by the paper's word count limit.
- Keep your letter to 3-4 paragraphs.
  - The first paragraph should clearly identify the issue.
  - If the paper has covered the issue, be sure to reference this coverage in your first paragraph.
  - The second paragraph should cover how the issue should be resolved and the benefits of the solution. Include statistics and your personal story to support your assertions.
  - The concluding paragraph should describe what the legislator needs to do.
- Include your contact information. Many papers will only print the letter after calling the author to verify his or her contact information.
- If you have any questions, or if you want FARE to review your letter, email it to Jon Hoffman at [jhoffman@foodallergy.org](mailto:jhoffman@foodallergy.org) and Jeramie Irwin at [jirwin@foodallergy.org](mailto:jirwin@foodallergy.org).
- Once the content is ready, review it for any grammar or spelling errors and follow the paper's submission instructions.

### 4. FOLLOW UP ON YOUR SUBMISSION

- If you don't hear from the paper within 1–2 business days, follow-up with the editorial page editor.
- Email Jon Hoffman a copy of the letter you submitted.
- If the paper prints your letter, share your success on your social media channels and send Jon a link to the article.

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# WRITING A PERSONAL LETTER TO A LEGISLATOR

## 1. ASSEMBLE YOUR CONTENT

- FARE will provide talking points and background materials on the issue.
- Be prepared to relate your personal story. How does the issue affect your life with food allergies?

## 2. DRAFT AND REVIEW YOUR LETTER

- Include your address block at the top to establish that you're a constituent.
- Keep your letter to one typed page. Include 3–4 paragraphs.
  - The first paragraph should clearly identify the issue, confirm that you're a constituent, and establish what you want the legislator to do.
  - The second paragraph should provide more detail on the issue and include your personal story.
  - The concluding paragraph should reiterate what you want the legislator to do.
- Include a signature block at the bottom.
- If you have any questions, or if you want FARE to review your letter, email it to Jon Hoffman at [jhoffman@foodallergy.org](mailto:jhoffman@foodallergy.org) and Jeramie Irwin at [jirwin@foodallergy.org](mailto:jirwin@foodallergy.org).
- Once the content is ready, review it for any grammar or spelling errors, print it, and add your signature.

## 3. FIND YOUR LEGISLATOR'S OFFICE ADDRESS:

- House Members:  
<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Senate Members:  
[https://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](https://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)

On each legislator's website, they will provide their district office address. Send your letter to the district office closest to your home. **DO NOT** send it to Washington, D.C. Because of the mail scanning procedures currently in place, the letter will take too long to reach your legislator's office.

If you are mailing the letter to a state legislator, first determine whether the legislature is in session. If it is, locate the address for their office in the capitol. If not, locate their district office address. All of this information can be found on the state legislature's website or your legislator's website.

## 4. FOLLOW-UP WITH FARE'S ADVOCACY TEAM

- If the office follows-up with you, let Jon know. Pass along any questions from the legislator that you need help answering.

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# CALLING A LEGISLATOR

## 1. PREPARE FOR YOUR CALL

- FARE will provide talking points and background materials on the issue for your review.
- Connect your personal story to the issue. How does it affect your life with food allergies?
- End your call by asking your legislator for their support. You must make it clear what you want the office to do!
- Prepare to deliver this information in about 1–2 minutes.

## 2. FIND YOUR LEGISLATOR'S PHONE NUMBER:

- House Members:  
<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Senate Members:  
[https://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](https://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)

On each legislator's website, they provide their D.C. contact information.

Or, you can call the Capitol Hill switchboard at **202-224-3121** and ask to be connected with the Representative or Senator's office.

If you are calling a state legislator, first determine whether the legislature is in session. If it is, locate the phone number for their office in the capitol. If not, locate their district office phone number. All of this information can be found on the state legislature's website or your legislator's website.

## 3. CALL THE LEGISLATOR'S OFFICE

- In most cases, a staff person will answer your call and take a message for the legislator.
- Identify yourself as a constituent and a FARE Advocate.
- Tell the staff person the issue you are calling to talk to the legislator about.
- Begin working through the talking points and your story. Conclude with the ask for the legislator.
- If the staff person asks a question you can't answer, don't worry! Record the question and tell them that you will call them back with the answer.
- Record the name of the staff person who took your call.
- Thank the staff person for his or her time.

## 4. FOLLOW-UP WITH FARE'S ADVOCACY TEAM

- Email Jon Hoffman with the results of your call at [jhoffman@foodallergy.org](mailto:jhoffman@foodallergy.org).
- If the office had a question, include it in the email along with the staff person's name.

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## POSTING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

### 1. FOR EACH PLATFORM YOU POST ON, UNDERSTAND ITS LIMITATIONS AND USE BEST PRACTICES

- Legislators are more active on Twitter and Facebook.
- For Twitter:
  - Keep your post to a maximum of 280 characters
  - Include a picture with your post
  - Tag @foodallergy so we can see and amplify your posts
- For Facebook:
  - For the best results, limit your post to about 80 words
  - Include a picture—or even a short video (15-30 seconds)—with your post

### 2. FIND YOUR PHOTO:

- Social media posts with pictures or video reach a larger audience
- If you have a personal photo that works with the content of your post, please use it!
- If you need free graphics to use with your post, you can find them on:
  - <https://unsplash.com/>
  - <https://pixabay.com/>
  - <https://canva.com/>

### 3. FIND YOUR LEGISLATOR'S SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

- On Facebook
  - Choose the Town Hall feature from the left navigation menu
  - Town Hall will help you find the accounts for your federal, state and local elected officials
- On Twitter
  - Find your member of Congress's account at <http://www.tweetcongress.org/tweeters>
  - For state or local elected officials, search their name using Twitter's search function. Most are using Twitter, but some don't.

Be sure to tag your legislator's social media handle in your post and identify yourself as a constituent.

### 4. INCLUDE THE HASHTAG #FOODALLERGY IN YOUR POST

- Using this hashtag will add your post to our social media conversation and help make sure FARE sees your post!

If you have any questions, please contact Jon Hoffman at [jhoffman@foodallergy.org](mailto:jhoffman@foodallergy.org) or MacKenzie Masten at [mmasten@foodallergy.org](mailto:mmasten@foodallergy.org).





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