

# Advocacy Guide 2021-22

## A Guide to Meeting with Your Legislators

### Preliminary Preparation

#### Requesting a Meeting

- Find contact information for your Pennsylvania legislator(s) online.
- Contact your legislator(s) to schedule a virtual meeting or call. Before you request a virtual meeting with your legislator's office, make sure you have access to a virtual meeting platform (i.e., Microsoft Teams, Zoom) and are comfortable navigating it.

*My name is (name) and I am a student from (your university name). May I please speak to the scheduler? As a constituent of (elected official's name), I (we) would appreciate 30 minutes of (his/her) time to discuss how the General Assembly can support Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education. These are the names of the people attending the meeting \_\_\_\_\_ . Thank you for checking the (representative's/senator's schedule). You can reach me at (telephone number or e-mail address).*

- Write down the scheduler's name. Be sure to get the correct spelling. Make every effort to get a meeting with the legislator, but some circumstances will only allow you to meet with their staff. Always leave your name and phone number. You may have to contact the office several times before someone returns your call or confirms an appointment. Be persistent and proactive—you are calling as a voting constituent.
- Once a meeting date/time is confirmed, offer to "host" the meeting, but recognize the legislator's office might have a preferred platform that you will need to use.
- Inform your team once you've scheduled the meeting.

## Preparing for the Meeting

- If you are unfamiliar with the virtual platform, practice. Test your Internet connection and/or phone signal by video chatting a family member or friend.
- Review the legislator's profile with which you are speaking with and note the legislative committees on which the member serves.
- Make sure your background is not distracting. If you are taking the meeting in front of a window, if possible, cover the window so you do not appear as a silhouette on screen. Better yet, use our [#Together4PASSHE background](#).
- If you live with others, notify them to give you privacy within the timeframe of your meeting.
- Prepare your message. Write down what you want to say so you can stay on message. Review our talking points.
- Make your points clear by explaining how the General Assembly's support of the State System impacts the legislator's district and constituents, as well as the region, state and nation.
- When possible, discuss funding of the State System from a personal perspective – share your own experience or that of a family member or friend who has benefited from State System education.
- If multiple advocates plan to join the call, assign a leader who will open and close the meeting and keep things running on time.
- Before the meeting begins, silence your cell phone and place it out of view.

## During the Meeting

- Refer to your legislator as Representative, if he or she is a member of the House of Representatives, or Senator, if he or she is a member of the Senate.
- Always treat them with respect, even if they disagree.
- Engage the legislator/staff by sharing your experiences, stories and asking questions. Use stories about your experience as a State System student. The more genuine you are, the more the legislator will care about what you have to say.
- Leave time for questions from the legislator and/or staff.

## After the Meeting

- Write down as much as you remember. Was the legislator supportive? Did they request follow-up information?
- Share with us how your meeting(s) went. Use our [online form](#).
- Send a quick thank you email to your legislator(s); include a copy of our leave-behind or fact sheet to serve as a future resource for your legislator(s). Refer to our virtual resource center for these materials.

## Sample Legislative Meeting Outline

### Introduction (3 mins):

- Introduce yourself and how you are connected to Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education.
- Explain the reason for the meeting and identify yourself as a constituent, if applicable.

### Tell Your Story:

- If you are a student, talk about your experiences and how your State System university has played a role in preparing you for future success.
- If you are faculty or staff, briefly talk about its benefits to students and the commonwealth and the value of strong state investment.
- If you are an alumni/donor, briefly talk about the impact State System education had on your success.
- If you or someone you know has benefited from a State System education and/or student financial aid, briefly share those stories.

## The Ask (5 mins):

- **Increased investment in Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education**

We can make the greatest difference for Pennsylvania students when we work together. The State System's annual budget request presents an opportunity for the State System and the Commonwealth to work strategically and financially together, partnering in pursuit of increased financial stability, affordability, and accessibility. What we invest today comes back to all of us and our Commonwealth tomorrow.

The General Assembly can double down on the State System, passing a state budget that makes an intentional intervention and financial commitment to help the System provide a financially strong public higher education system for all Pennsylvanians that is accessible.

## Talking Points (see #Together4PASSHE digital resource center):

- Increased investment in the State System and its students will lead to:
  - Financially stronger State System universities
  - A more affordable State System education, particularly for low-income students
  - More Pennsylvanians staying in Pennsylvania for college, meaning in-state undergraduate enrollment increases
  - More students moving from private, for-profit institutions to State System universities
  - State System students being more likely to persist and (timely) graduate
  - More degrees and certificates awarded across State System universities, helping Pennsylvania meet its workforce needs
  - Increased societal benefits and increased state tax revenue
  - Increased statewide bachelor's degree attainment
  - Increased opportunity to further invest in marketing and student support services

## Closing (1 min):

- Thank the lawmaker for his or her time. Ask if they would like any additional information.

## Sample Meeting Script:

*Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am both a constituent and a student of \_\_\_\_\_ University of Pennsylvania. Thank you for meeting with us.*

*We're speaking with you to ask you to ensure that students like us have access to a high-quality affordable State System degree and expanded educational opportunities. And we know that increased financial support is necessary for the System to continue its mission, and a thriving commonwealth is dependent on an educated workforce.*

*From my experiences, I know I am well-equipped to positively contribute to Pennsylvania. Are you familiar with or have any family attending a System university?*

*Let me tell you about the impact my university has made in my life...*

*My fellow students can provide their unique perspectives, too...*

*The System is seeking \$550 million in state appropriations to support university operations. Additional direct-to-student funding would fuel access and opportunity for students like me. Combined, our universities can continue their innovation and ensure vibrant higher education opportunities for decades more.*

*Your investment will pay dividends. Universities contribute nearly \$8 for every one dollar of public funds expended!*

*We hope our stories illustrate the positive impact of System universities, such as \_\_\_\_\_ University.*

*Thank you for your attention and commitment to the State System. It truly does make a difference. Do you need any additional information?*

## Other ways to deliver your message

While an in-person or remote meeting is usually the most effective way to go, consider these other ways to communicate with lawmakers:

### Emailing

Email can be an effective way to communicate with lawmakers if you already have a relationship with them. Follow the best practices in advocacy letter writing mentioned below. However, note that correspondence by email, particularly form letters, does have disadvantages. Be particularly emphatic from the beginning of your message or it just might be out of mind with one tap of the delete key.

### Calling

Making a phone call to your elected official is quick, easy, and can be done at a moment's notice. Consider using this script as a guide for placing calls; students and alumni please make sure to speak about your personal experiences:

*Hi, my name is (your name), and I'm a student at (your university). I live in your district in (name of city or town).*

*I'm calling because I believe everyone deserves access to a high-quality, affordable public higher education at a State System university. That requires making more affordable and accessible a State System education through historic, ongoing, and recurrent investment.*

*Please pass a state budget that makes an intentional intervention and financial commitment to help the System provide a financially strong public higher education system for all Pennsylvanians that is accessible.*

*Thank you for all you are doing for Pennsylvania. Thank you for supporting affordable public higher education and (your university), a proud member of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education.*

## Writing

A well-written letter to your legislator allows you to give more information than a phone call, and often has a greater impact than an email, for example:

*I urge you to support increased funding for Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education, which would help ensure that future students like me have access to a high-quality affordable State System degree. As a constituent who attends (your university) studying (your program) who will soon (your employment plans), I thought I should bring the positive effects of the State System to your attention.*

*From my experiences, I know I am well-equipped to positively contribute to Pennsylvania's economy. Did you know? Within 18 months of graduation, 92 percent of alumni are employed, continuing their education, or serving in the military. What's more, on average, 40 years after graduating, System alumni receive a return of investment of more than \$866K.*

*This fiscal year the System is seeking ...*

*Your investment will pay dividends. Universities contribute nearly \$8 for every one dollar of public funds expended!*

*I urge you to support increased funding for Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education. May I count on your support? I look forward to receiving your answer.*

*Thank you for considering my request on this matter. I hope that my expressed support will make a difference in your decision as you consider the FY 22-23 state budget.*

Consider these best practices:

- Use a letter to follow-up on your phone call or visit.
- Keep your letter to one page or less and focus on a single subject.
- **Handwritten legible letters are exceptionally effective.**
- Open the letter in an official manner, using the title of the office and the official's full name. Use appropriate titles, e.g., Representative or Senator may be addressed as Honorable.
- Identify yourself as a constituent residing in his or her legislative district. Provide your name, return address, and telephone number including the area code.
- Summarize your position in the first paragraph and use the rest of the letter for explanation and supporting information.
- Tell your story about how your State System education has touched your academic or professional life.
- Ask for specific action—increased support for the State System—and tell them why it's important.
- Share your thanks and restate your most important message.
- Run spell/grammar check before sending!

## Video Testimonial

State System students and graduates have powerful stories. Consider sharing yours to help illustrate why you care about increased state support for the State System and inspire legislators to do the same. Remember to keep it brief—two minutes or less! Post to social media, tag @statesystem or email your testimonial to [abrumbach@passhe.edu](mailto:abrumbach@passhe.edu).

To share your story effectively, consider these tips:

- Introduce yourself with a few details, including your name.
- Describe your challenges in choosing a college or university. Did you have to choose a university based on its affordability? Did you want to attend college, but you didn't know how to afford it?
- Share why you attend/ed a State System university.
- Discuss how your choice to attend a State System university has affected you. How is it preparing you for professional and personal success?
- Explain that your story is just one example of the importance of thriving State System universities.
- Pivot to a legislative ask—increased state support. By investing in the State System, the General Assembly can multiply the impact of a high-quality, affordable public higher education.

## Getting Social

Use social media to bring awareness to the meaningful ways our universities have joined with local, regional, and state partners, and to garner stakeholder support, financial and otherwise, for the future of the State System and its students.

- How to get involved:
  - Follow the State System (@statesystem) on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.
  - Follow your elected officials and state leaders across social media.
  - Post photos, video and other digital content in support of message and goal (see above); use hashtag #Together4PASSHE.
  - Tag @statesystem and elected officials or state/business leaders
  - Tag your university and other campus groups.
  - Share, retweet & like @statesystem **#Together4PASSHE**
  - Be truthful and accurate. Add value. Have fun!

- For in-person advocacy, consider taking photos of yourselves at meetings with legislators. These can be shared on social media or used for purposes later on to show advocacy in action. For photo collection purposes, please email photos to [abrumbach@passhe.edu](mailto:abrumbach@passhe.edu) and identify those in the photo.
- For virtual advocacy, take a virtual “selfie” by taking a screenshot of the online participants. Make sure you tell participants you are taking a “selfie” so they can prepare for the “photo” or opt-out by turning their video off. Share on social media, tag @statesystem and use hashtag #Together4PASSHE.
  - Thank them for meeting with you.
  - Mention the issue(s) you talked about.
  - Tag them (if they’re on social media).
- **Sample Messages:**
  - As the FY 22-23 #PABudget is discussed, we ask the General Assembly to support @statesystem universities. #Together4PASSHE
  - #PABudget must provide robust recurring support for @statesystem to keep tuition low. #Together4PASSHE
  - Providing robust support in the next #PABudget is critical to @statesystem providing an affordable public higher education option. #Together4PA
  - In the next #PABudget, the General Assembly must provide state appropriations that support @statesystem providing a vibrant higher education opportunity. #Together4PASSHE
  - Success of @statesystem is critical to the success of PA’s economic future. Join us & ask PA General Assembly to support increased funding. #Together4PASSHE
  - @statesystem universities provide pathways to a better life for students. To continue providing career-relevant post-secondary higher education opportunities, they need #PABudget support. #Together4PASSHE
  - My @statesystem university is providing access to high-value high-demand programs that are preparing me to make positive contributions to PA. #Together4PA
  - @statesystem universities are critical to the future of PA & more state funding will ensure PA has the educated workforce it needs. #Together4PASSHE