

Meeting with Candidates



"Members of Parliament are supposed to represent US and be OUR voice in the decision-making processes in parliament. But, how do they know what we want unless we actually TELL them?"

"I met with Peter Costello and told him my story. I thought it was going to be intimidating and scary but it was OK. In fact I now feel as though I have done something positive for both myself and my children. The following tips helped me to stay focused and calm."

1. Be Prepared!

- Prepare a page of dot points of all the issues you want to discuss. (Refer to NACBCS Demands) Practice telling your story so that your issues and concerns are communicated in a coherent way. Imagine some responses that might be made, (such as disagreeing with you, cutting you off, interrupting, offering to help, asking questions etc.) and practise how you can reply.
- Two or three parents together can have a powerful impact. Safety in numbers can help reduce any feelings of being intimidated. Allocate who is going to talk about what point and who will write down the responses.
- Have copies of newspaper articles, NACBCS demands, photographs, letters etc. available to take with you to the meeting as evidence of your issues. Take along pens (that work), spare notepaper and a camera! Write a 'letter' detailing all the issues and concerns that you are going to discuss. Give this to candidates at the conclusion of the meeting to reiterate what you have said.
- Organise childcare for the children so that you can focus on your issues

DO be polite, friendly, firm, assertive, humorous, informed, patient, understanding, confident, professional and helpful.

DON'T shout, insult, threaten, abuse, be rude, aggressive, meek, mild, intimidated, or bulldozed.

You can find out what electorate you are in and who your local member and candidates are through the Australian Electoral Commission www.aec.gov.au or 13 23 26

This page was created by Kerry Phelan – a parent & community ownership activist. For a complete account of Kerry's story & more tips on meeting with candidates visit:

www.childrenfirst.org.au

2. Meeting Etiquette

- Dress neatly, it will show that you are serious and trustworthy.
- Be punctual, polite and friendly. Introduce yourself to the reception staff, stating your name, what childcare centre/organisation you use/are from, and your appointment details.
- Shake hands. Thank them for meeting with you. Compliment them on some positive action they've undertaken recently – this will show that you are well informed and not hostile. These actions can encourage MP's/candidates to be more receptive to your issues and concerns and to be more helpful in achieving your aims.
- Keep the atmosphere positive by listening and showing that you are interested in their point of view. State your case clearly and precisely and detail the specific help you want. Keep the discussion on track and stick to the topics that you prepared. Dare to interrupt (politely!) and be confident when you ask and answer questions.
- Stick to your allocated time and at the conclusion of the meeting state clearly, and document, what has been covered, what has been agreed to and any action that is to be taken. Ask if you can have a photo taken that can be sent to the local newspaper telling them about your meeting and the results achieved. (MP's/candidates love to have local media coverage and this can often help them stay committed to the actions promised – you can also use the media coverage to highlight the childcare issue of concern and how they offered/declined to help)
- Thank the MP again for their time and shake hands. Leave the office and meet at a nearby local coffee shop to go over the meeting. Do NOT stand outside the MP's office discussing the meeting. Save any chatter until you are out of hearing range.

3. Follow up

Write a letter thanking the MP/Candidate for the meeting and make sure you detail what was discussed during the meeting, what was agreed to and what action was decided.

Contact the local paper and tell them about the meeting, any photos taken and the outcomes.