What is a Town Hall meeting?

Each year congressional leaders host Town Hall meetings in their districts where they meet with constituents and provide updates from Washington, D.C. In addition to providing unique opportunities for face-to-face interactions with your representatives, town hall meetings allow you to promote your organization’s message -- so being organized and educating yourself about pending legislation or the issue you’re asking about is absolutely necessary. Town hall meetings are free to attend and are open to the public.

When and Where?

To find out when and where the next town hall meeting in your community will be held, it's a good idea to monitor your elected officials’ websites, subscribe to email alerts, or periodically check their social media outlets for updates. You can also visit https://townhallproject.com/, a nonprofit organization that's focused on empowering constituents across the country to have face-to-face conversations with their elected representatives.

What to Expect?

Town hall meetings usually last for an hour with most of the focus being on Q&A. Representatives will typically speak for 20-30 minutes about their legislative efforts and notable votes, then they open the floor to attendees to ask questions. This is your opportunity to ask a question about a particular piece of legislation and/or their position on the issue of marijuana law reform.

Code of Conduct

Always be polite. Regardless of how much you disagree with your representative’s position, your question will be best received if asked respectfully and tactfully. Being rude or confrontational will ensure a more guarded response and could even turn the audience against you. Stay calm.

Don’t forget to dress to impress. One of the biggest obstacles that we face for advancing policy is simply cliche stereotypes.

Promote Your Efforts

Have someone video record your questioning and if possible, live tweet the exchange tagging @NORML so we can amplify your engagement!
Do Your Research

It’s incredibly important to research your representatives before each town hall meeting. The goal is to have a better understanding of their motivations, grasp of the issue, and voting record. The more you know, the easier it will be. If you disagree with the way they voted on a bill or their general position on an issue, those are great points to bring up when you are given the chance. (Example: “Can you explain to me why you voted against X bill last week, which would have done Y?”).

Additionally, know what you want to talk about! A great resource is the NORML Fact Sheets, which even have 1-page PDFs that you can print out and bring with you at https://norml.org/marijuana/fact-sheets.

Don’t Be Afraid to Ask Questions

Raise your hand or move to the questions line immediately when your representative asks for questions. The longer you wait, the more competition you will have for the microphone. This is your opportunity to make your voice heard, so make sure you’re prepared. Also, try to limit yourself to one specific question and topic to avoid causing confusion and don’t let the questions asked before yours influence what you plan to say.

Framing Your Question

A good way to frame a question is to base it on an action. For example, asking “What will you do legislatively to resolve the conflict between state and federal marijuana laws?” or “What have you done to protect states that have implemented medical or adult-use marijuana programs?” will make it more difficult for your representatives to answer using only talking points.

Thousands of bills are introduced during each Congress so it’s imperative to know as much as possible in order to educate your representatives. Most representatives aren’t able to memorize every bill, so if you ask questions about specific legislation, be prepared to quickly explain what the legislation does.
Sample Questions

- Representative: According to recent polling, more than 60% of Americans support ending marijuana prohibition and 74% oppose the federal government interfering with states that have expanded cannabis access. What are your thoughts here and will you commit to support legislation like The MORE Act, HR 3884, which was recently introduced by the Judiciary Chairman and would allow states to set their own policies free from federal interference?

- Representative: Recent polling shows that a whopping 94% of Americans support the use of medical marijuana when recommended by a physician. Why are there currently not protections for the two-thirds of states that have chosen to respect the rights of doctors to recommend cannabis to their patients and will you support legislation such as The MORE Act, HR 3884, which would stop the Justice Department from being able to interfere in the states that have medical marijuana?

Wrapping Up

After the town hall is over, most representatives mingle with attendees for a few extra minutes to take additional questions. If you didn’t have a chance to ask your question during the meeting, or you have additional questions, this will be your opportunity. If your representative does not stick around after the town hall, or you have trouble accessing them, locate their staff and speak to them instead. They can take your comments, answer questions, and refer you to appropriate staff members for follow-up.

Interacting with Town Hall Attendees (i.e. your neighbors)

Stick around after the meeting and network with other attendees. Introduce yourself to anyone in the audience who had questions about marijuana law reform and offer to clarify any questions or concerns expressed. The same goes for those who are in line with your views; talk to them after the meeting is over. Bring business cards, flyers, etc, and be ready to share your contact information with staff members and town hall attendees for follow up questions.

Democracy is not a spectator sport and everyone who shows up to town hall meetings want to play an active role. This is great fertile ground to meet other like-minded individuals and work together with them in our shared mission to change laws.