Advocacy Guide

A Guide to Meeting with Your Legislators

Preliminary Preparation

Requesting a Meeting

- Find contact information for your Pennsylvania legislator(s) online. Visit legis.state.pa.us.
- Contact your legislator(s) to schedule an in-person or virtual meeting. 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 email 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 understand that in some circumstances, you will only be able 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 polite, but persistent and proactive—you are calling as a voting constituent.

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- 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 profile of the legislator with whom you'll be speaking and note the legislative committees on which the legislator serves.
- Before the video chat, make sure your background is not distracting. If you are taking the meeting in front of a window, cover it if you can so you do not appear as a silhouette on screen. Better yet, use our #FundPASSHE4PA background.
- If you live with others, ask them to give you privacy during 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 and asking questions. Use stories about your experience as a State System student to illustrate your point. 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 meeting reporting form.
- Send a quick thank-you email to your legislator(s); include a copy of our leave-behind to serve as a future resource for your legislator(s). Refer to our advocacy resource center for these materials. Short, handwritten notes are preferred.

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 alumnus/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):

PASSHE is requesting two investments to make higher education more affordable for all students, plus targeted investments to enable our PASSHE universities to educate more students for high-growth jobs.

To keep tuition affordable, PASSHE is requesting $573.5 million (an inflationary increase of 3.8%):

This would enable the Board to consider a tuition freeze for a 5th unprecedented consecutive year.

Despite 4 years of tuition freezes, the total cost of attendance is still very high.

We're the lowest cost four-year option in Pennsylvania...

But the third most expensive public university in the country.

The cost is too high for many students, especially working adults, rural students, students of color, and those seeking credentials so they can advance in their careers. Our labor force needs them.

Separately, we're requesting $112 million to provide targeted financial aid to strategically strengthen Pennsylvania's workforce by enrolling and graduating more students prepared for careers with significant labor shortages.

Talking Points (see #FundPASSHE4PA digital resource center):

- PASSHE is expanding opportunities and improving outcomes – and is primed to meet Pennsylvania's critical shortage of workers.
  - Employers can't find enough workers with the education and skills for important jobs where the need for workers is growing.
  - PASSHE has a plan to address labor shortages by graduating more students into high-growth jobs.
- PASSHE is requesting state funding ($573.5 million) to make higher education more affordable for all students and targeted investments ($112 million) to educate more students for careers in high-growth jobs.
  - Those job areas are business, education, computer science, engineering, nursing, and social services.
  - Communities rely on these jobs, but employers can't find enough people with the skills.
  - These programs are already among the most enrolled and strongest at our universities.
  - Universities will dedicate most of this investment to removing financial barriers so more students can get the education needed to fill these important jobs.
- PASSHE would use $99 million of the $112 million strategic investment for student financial aid and $13 million to provide student support services and supplement high-cost, high-growth programs to help students enroll and start careers in six high-growth fields.
  - For examples of how the strategic investment would be used for each program, see the #fundPASSHE4PA Advocacy Resource Center.
- I hope we can count on your support to reinvest in PASSHE and our students:
  - $573.6 million (a 3.8% increase) to keep tuition affordable.
  - $112 million for university financial aid to students pursuing high-growth jobs.

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. 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 public higher education and expanded educational opportunities. Increased strategic investment is necessary for PASSHE to continue its mission, and a thriving commonwealth depends 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 PASSHE 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 $573.5 million in state appropriations to support university operations and keep PASSHE tuition the lowest of any four-year option. An additional, separate, strategic investment of $112 million in new funding would enable our universities to enroll and graduate students who will be prepared for careers in fields with significant labor shortages: business, education, computer science, engineering, nursing, and social services.

Your investment will pay dividends. PASSHE universities produced about 7% of all workers in Pennsylvania over the past 15 years, and PASSHE 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 PASSHE university. That requires state funding to keep tuition the lowest of any four-year option in our state.

Please pass a state budget that makes public higher education more affordable for all students and enables PASSHE universities to educate more students for careers in high-growth jobs.

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.

For Fiscal Year 2023-24, the System is seeking a 3.8% increase ($21 million), average annual percent increase in inflation over the past three years, for an investment of $573.5 million to enable the State System to freeze undergraduate tuition for all students for an unprecedented fifth consecutive year.

PASSHE is also seeking $112 million for a separate strategic investment to enroll and graduate students prepared for careers in fields with significant labor shortages: business, education, computer science, engineering, nursing, and social services. $99 million of that amount would be used for student financial aid, lowering the price to attend a university, which is a major cause of the current labor shortage.

Your investment will pay dividends. PASSHE universities produced about 7% of all workers in Pa. over the past 15 years, and PASSHE universities contribute nearly $8 for every one dollar of public funds expended!

I urge you to support increased funding for PASSHE and students like me. 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 23-24 state budget.

Consider these best practices:Use a letter to follow up on your phone call or visit.

- 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.

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 make public higher education more affordable for all students and enable PASSHE universities to educate more students for careers in high-growth jobs and industries.

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 #FundPASSHE4PA
  - Tag @statesystem and elected officials or state/business leaders
  - Tag your university and other campus groups.
  - Share, retweet & like @statesystem #FundPASSHE4PA
  - 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.eduand 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 #FundPASSHE4PA.
  - 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 23-24 #PABudget is discussed, we ask the General Assembly to support @statesystem universities. #FundPASSHE4PA
  - #PABudget must provide robust recurring support for @statesystem to keep tuition low. #FundPASSHE4PA
  - An increase in state funding for @statesystem supports student affordability & helps tackle PA's labor shortages. #FundPASSHE4PA
  - In the next #PABudget, the General Assembly must provide @statesystem with support to meet the changing needs of students & the workforce. #FundPASSHE4PA
  - Success of @statesystem is critical to the success of PA's economic future. Join us & ask PA General Assembly to support increased funding. #FundPASSHE4PA
  - .@statesystem universities provide pathways to a better life for students. To continue providing career-relevant, affordable higher education opportunities, they need #PABudget support. #FundPASSHE4PA
  - My @statesystem university is providing access to high-quality, high-growth programs that are preparing me to make positive contributions to PA. #FundPASSHE4PA
  - .@statesystem universities are critical to the future of PA & more state funding will ensure PA has the educated workforce it needs. #FundPASSHE4PA