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POLICY ADVOCACY GUIDE TO SEEK POLICY THAT PROTECTS YOUR FUTURE



PREPARED BY

THE POLICY COMMITTEE OF THE 1ST COHORT OF THE
U.S. YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE UN OCEAN DECADE,
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HEIRS TO OUR OCEANS

SPEAKING TO YOUR CONGRESSPERSON

I. DETERMINE THE SUBJECT MATTER OF YOUR MEETING:

Are you (1) seeking support for a plan to become a bill (or support for a template bill), or (2) asking that a bill be supported, amended, or rejected, or (3) asking for an amendment to existing legislation, or a law?

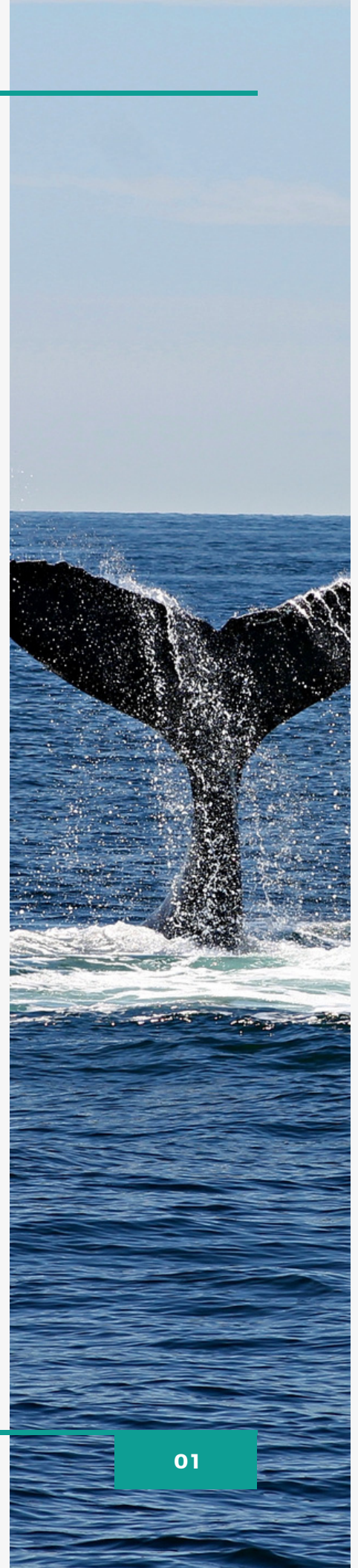
Example of a:

- Plan is Ocean Climate Action Plan (OCAP)
- Bill is Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act (BFFPPA)
- Law for which amendment is sought is Magnuson-Stevens Act Reauthorization (MSA Reauthorization)

II. PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

A. Research and review the plan, the bill, or the existing law sought to amend.

1. Where to look to research? Online! Typically you can find the plan, the bill or the law for which amendment is sought online. You should be able to find the primary source. If it's a bill or a law, then it can be found on the government website, federal or state. If not, then often you can find it through a secondary source, such as respected organizations that are working on a bill or law.



2. Find shorter, yet information-dense, summaries. In some cases bills and legislation can span hundreds of pages long, such as the Ocean Climate-Based Solutions Act (OCBSA) which includes far more detail than is necessary to gain a solid general understanding and speak confidently and accurately on the piece. A good summary will provide you with the central points vital to the explanation of the piece. In locating a summary of a bill or law, one may be attached to it! Simply search the text for “summary” using ctrl+F or command+F. You can head to <https://www.congress.gov/> if the bill is in Congress. An organization working on the bill may also have summarized the bill. While a google search may turn it up, keep in mind that the synthesis or summary of the bill may reflect an opinion of the bill. You will want an objective summary.

3. Take note of who authored or sponsored the bill or legislation or if a congressperson became a signatory endorsing a plan. If a bill is active, it will have authors and sponsors.

4. Use a thoughtful and intentionally critical eye when reviewing and think about formulating your "ask" accordingly. Does it really protect our future? If so, how? If not, why not? Could something be changed? Should it be rejected all together? Who drafted it? Does it read as though all stakeholders were “at the table” when it was drafted? If a plan or bill is focused on an issue, but only includes one group of stakeholders, is it really going to properly solve that issue? Are marginalized and/or frontline communities’ needs reflected? If marginalized peoples were not a part of the drafting, then is it likely to protect us and our generation? Is it equitable and thus something you would want to be law, or better to seek revisiting the plan, bill or law?

5. Take notes as you review. Note specific comments and questions pertaining to sections of the plan, bill or legislation.

6. Think about what you'd like to personally speak to at the meeting. Typically when working in groups each individual talks about something specific. Identify what portion of the plan, bill or law to be reauthorized/amended you'd like to speak to. You can base your area of focus on your prior knowledge and interests.



B. Organize Your Meeting.

1. Identify the congressperson you plan to meet with.

Who do you want to meet with and why?

a. Consider their district relative to yours. Do they represent you in Congress? If not, are they nonetheless an important lawmaker to meet with? Do you have a close relative in their district as a reason to meet with that lawmaker?

b. What is their relationship to the plan, bill or legislation for which an amendment is sought? Do they oppose it? Are they on the fence and therefore are important to sway? Did they draft a law for which amendment is sought?

2. Research the congressperson. It is important that you know as much as you can about the office and congressperson who you want to meet with. If it is someone who is likely to oppose a bill you would like to see passed, what common ground can you find? Is there anything related to the bill that you believe the lawmaker might appreciate? What might his constituents appreciate? Is the region they represent affected by the bill? Thoroughly research the Congressperson and think strategically how to approach your ask considering their interests. Consider talking to experts to prepare as thoughtful an ask as possible.

a. How to research a lawmaker? Google! Every congressperson has a website offering information about their values and focus areas. Additionally, you can see which committee they sit on and their engagement. Also, what bills have they authored or sponsored to date?

For example: Rep. Stacey Plaskett of the US Virgin Islands serves on the Committee of Agriculture. This may show she has some knowledge about food scarcity and industrialized agriculture practices as well as agriculture subsidies.



b. Check the lawmaker's past voting history and bills they have authored or sponsored. On their website there may be a "legislation" tab. If not, go to congress.gov and search for the congressperson.

For example: If attending a meeting with Congressperson Scott Franklin, you might mention during the meeting that you look forward to hearing more about the American Shores Protection Act which he co-sponsored.

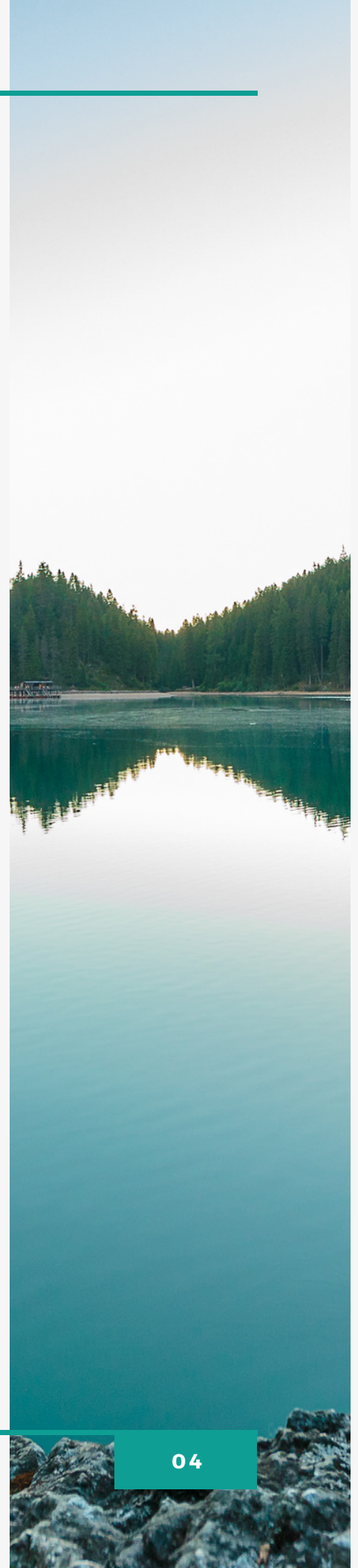
3. Find authors and sponsors. In order to garner support for a plan or bill, or to amend an existing piece of legislation, determine who has already voiced their support for it. By knowing the authors or sponsors you can identify their political allies to better determine who needs persuading and who doesn't. If you have questions about the bill or law, direct them to the author or sponsor. To find authors it's simply a matter of searching for the bill or existing legislation <https://www.congress.gov/>

4. Set your meeting! Setting a meeting with a congressperson is often done either through their website online (submitting a form) or with a phone call. If you don't get a response to a submitted web form, then give the office a call. Often, Congresspersons don't set their calendars for meetings months in advance, so you may have to keep trying depending upon when you reach out relative to your Hill Day dates. Also, does the lawmaker have a newsletter? If so, sign up! Stay up to date on what they're doing before and after your meeting.

C. Get Yourself and Your Team Ready..

1. Coordinate with your team. Determine who is speaking when and what each person's "talking point" focus will be during the meeting. Ensure time on the front end for introductions and at the back end thanking the lawmaker or aide.

2. Prepare your "talking points". Prepare your "talking points" well ahead of time based upon your research of the lawmaker and your review of the plan, bill or existing legislation for which you seek an amendment. Be clear and concise and considerate of time.



3. Prepare or organize "Fact Sheets". Facts sheets are highly recommended to take into a meeting with lawmakers. It is a 1-2 page document that summarizes a bill or existing legislation to be amended and shares what is being asked, by whom, and why. Best is to include fact-based data with sources cited to support your position.

4. Practice with your team! Go into the meeting fully prepared.

5. Prepare the congressional office for your meeting. Send a one-pager/Fact Sheet or other material about what you have to say so that they know what to expect from the meeting and to give them a reference for whatever your ask may be. Regardless of whether you can send ahead of time, take a copy to provide the lawmaker or aide at the outset of the meeting.

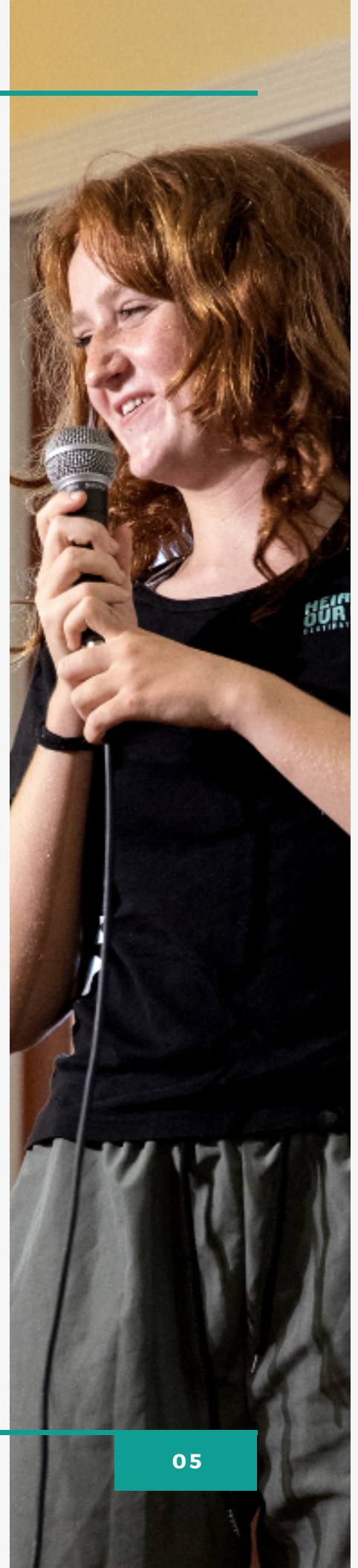
III. ATTENDING THE MEETING

A. Dress business casual/professional. Dress respectfully. You may be taken less seriously if you are dressed too casually.

B. Speak clearly, confidently and concisely. To make an "ask" it is important that you speak clearly, confidently and concisely. Avoid long-winded and vague statements.

C. Be specific with your "ask". Ensure it is clear and emphasized and not missed.

D. Speak passionately and express the importance of your position. Sharing your passion helps your message resonate. Storytelling and talking about personal experiences are effective tools to persuade people to support your ideas. Be honest and descriptive.





IV. FOLLOWING UP AFTER YOUR MEETING.

A. Send a note. Write a thank you card soon after the meeting addressed to the person(s) you met with, ideally sending a hand-written letter to the lawmaker's office. A couple of weeks later, follow up with an email or a phone call inquiring about your "ask". This shows the congressperson that you are not only appreciative of their time, but also that you are serious about the issues.

B. Follow the lawmaker via media. Consider following them on social media and signing up for their newsletter.

INFLUENCING LAWMAKERS IS ALL ABOUT
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.
CONTINUAL COMMUNICATION GOES A LONG WAY.
REALLY IT'S JUST ABOUT MAKING SURE THAT
THE OFFICE REMEMBERS YOU AND YOUR PRIORITIES.
THAT'S ESSENTIAL AS YOUR PRIORITY IS
SIMPLY TO ACHIEVE A BETTER AND SAFE FUTURE.