



Meeting with your MP/MLA or City Councillor

The Main Thing: Prioritize Relationships:

- The most important thing to remember is that public life is about relationships.
- How will you build respectful public, working relationships with this official?

Preparation:

Before you meet with a public official take some time to prepare:

1. Get clear about the purpose of the meeting. If it is about an issue, what you are asking for, make sure it is concrete, specific, significant and is winnable.
2. Develop a short, written proposal for what you want to ask them about. 1-2 pages maximum or a few PowerPoint slides that you can print off.
3. Get curious about the official. Most public officials enter public life because they want to make a positive difference. What difference do they want to make? What is their story? How can there be a win for them and their government? How does this line up with what you are asking for?
4. Develop an agenda and set time limits for each part of the conversation based on what you need to talk about in the time given.
5. Practice beforehand what you are planning to say, and how you might respond to what they say.

Setting up the meeting:

The best way to set up a meeting is to contact their constituency office (or for city councillors their city office). Most politicians set aside time to meet with their constituents. If you would like to meet with a politician and you are not their constituent, **find someone who is**. If this isn't possible, still try, but think of who they can't say no to setting up a meeting with. Tell them what you want to speak about. The executive assistant is the gatekeeper who is best to befriend. Ask how long your meeting will be. Send an email, if you don't get a response after a week follow-up with a phone call. Be persistent if needed.

Contact information can be found at:

1. Your MLA: <https://www.assembly.ab.ca/members/members-of-the-legislative-assembly>
2. Your MP: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en>
3. City councillor: <https://www.calgary.ca/citycouncil/citycouncil.html>

In the meeting:

1. Relationships are key and should be the priority of any first meeting. Begin with introductions but also go beyond names: share why you care about this issue and ask questions to find out their story and what they care about.
2. Present clearly what you are asking for. Back it up with why it is important. Then let them respond. Create some tension for them to respond to.
3. Then aim to have a conversation. The focus should be on how you can work with them to address the issue. Too many people come with only complaints that they want the politician to address. Come with possible solutions and a willingness to work together.
4. Focus on the politician's interests. What do they care about? What difference do they want to make? How does your ask connect with their interests?
5. Respect any time limits they have. Before your time is done decide on what the next steps are. Often, they will need to go back and look into what you are bringing them, so propose a follow-up meeting.
6. Thank them for meeting with you and give them your contact information.

After the meeting:

1. Follow up after the meeting with a note expressing your thanks for meeting and a summary of what was agreed to. Include any presentation you sent them.
2. Considering sharing on social media that you met with them, that you appreciate your time with them, including any commitments or photos. Be positive. Negative social media can end a relationship or block what you are asking for. Instead, use social media to **build** a relationship and to make public any commitments.

After the meeting comes the next meeting or actions.

1. The policy is usually changed through relationships. Relationships are rarely built over one meeting. Plan on having more than one meeting. What is your follow-up plan?
2. Look or ask who else you can meet with. Often change can come through meetings with deputy ministers or staff.

General principles:

1. Focus on building a relationship with the public official.
2. Don't come with a complaint. Identify a specific concrete issue. Identify a solution and offer to work with them to address the issues.
3. Approach this as a long-term process.
4. Focus on mutual respect – you don't want to be either chummy or aggressive with a public official. Neither is helpful.
5. Remember that public officials are people. They have their own interests, struggles, good days, bad days, challenges and joys. They are neither loftier than you, nor are you below them.

Key Talking Points

Green Line LRT Project

Ask: We are asking that the Province follow through with its commitment to Calgary's Green Line and gives The City of Calgary the funding it needs so construction can begin in July of 2021.

Jobs

- It will create 12,000 direct jobs, 20,000 including indirect jobs.
- Calgary's unemployment rate is 12.6 percent.
- People need jobs now. Every month this project is delayed means that it is one more month that families go without a paycheck.

Environment

- It will reduce greenhouse gasses by 30,000 tonnes. The Green Line is a key way to build a sustainable economy.

Connecting our City

- The Green Line will connect 2,300 existing affordable housing units.
- Support business and employee travel choice for 191,000 existing jobs.
- This will reduce congestion on existing roads.

Why go north over the Bow River?

- It is north of the Bow River that the Green Line begins to connect more economically marginalized communities.
- It is the route that goes north of the Bow River that is predicted to make the Green Line more economically sustainable.
- Going north of the Bow opens up better connections to Calgary's Airport.

What about the pandemic, the drop in ridership and the loss of downtown businesses?

- The Green Line is a transit project that will connect Calgarians for decades, if not generations. It is expected that after the pandemic, people will again use transit and continue to work downtown.
- The Green Line and the connections it makes are key components in ensuring that Calgary's downtown remains vibrant.
- The Green Line doesn't just connect to downtown, rather it will connect communities, businesses, services, parks and people all along its route.

Key Talking Points

Mental Health

ASK: The Ministries of Health and Education work together to implement a collaborative mental health framework for early intervention and prevention in our schools that include:

- **Comprehensive whole-school approaches to mental health for k-12 focusing on the wellbeing of students, staff and families**
- **Sustainable funding for trained full-time mental health coordinators for each school to implement strategies, and bridge services from across sectors.**
- **Students (K-6) have equitable access to a timely and proper assessment of needs when required.**

Need

- 70 % of mental health issues first appear when people are youth and 14-25% of children and youth experience significant mental health issues.
- Teachers report that mental health issues often first appear as attendance and behavioural issues in elementary school.
- Promotion and prevention early in life can bring a significant return on investment, by reducing demand for services in the mental health system and also in other sectors, such as the criminal justice system. *Changing Directions, Changing Lives: The Mental Health Strategy for Canada (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012)*

Response

- **The characteristics of the most effective interventions include:** focusing on positive mental health, delivering a mix of universal and targeted approaches, starting early with the youngest children, long term interventions which embed within the whole school's approach, linking with academic learning, working with and educating parents, community involvement and coordinated work with outside agencies. *"School-based Interventions", [The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health](#)*
- **Schools are ideally situated to promote mental health, identify and intervene early to prevent the onset of problems because children from all walks of life gather and learn in schools.** Senators Kirby and Keon state that, "development of the school as a site for the effective delivery of mental health services is essential". *School-Based Mental Health in Canada: A Final Report (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013).*
- **The right investment is building internal capacity.** Studies have shown that success and sustainability were achieved by building internal capacity by an on-site coordinator that was able to align various strategies with their organizational mission. The initial investment of a full-time mental health school coordinator also proves the most cost-effective. *"The RALLY Program: Scaling an Inclusive Approach to Intervention and Prevention", [the Harvard Family Research Project](#)*

Cost It will be less than the cost of joining a sports team. \$114 – that is the cost for each child in Alberta to have equal access, along with each parent and teacher, to a mental health professional. \$42 million for the province.

Why it is worth it. Given the important relationship between positive mental health and academic success, now is the time for schools to be better equipped in nurturing students' mental health and well-being. By investing in specialized and qualified mental health professionals, we can ensure effective treatment of mental health at the early stages and improved academic success. *Working Together to Support Mental Health in Alberta Schools, Alberta Education*

ASK: The Mental Health Mobile Response Team or PACT teams are expanded and become a service that is available 24 hours a day, and seven days a week. (With the MRT available until at least 2:00 am).

- The police themselves have identified that they are often called to mental health crises and that they are neither the right people to respond nor have adequate training to respond.
- When people are in a mental health crisis they need the right people, with the right training and a timely manner.
- The Mobile Response Teams (MRT) and Police and Crisis Teams (PACT) have already shown their success, they just need to be expanded.
- Most mental health crises happen between 10:00 pm and 2:00 am – which is when the current MRT/PACT is not available. This leaves people with only the options of Emergency rooms, which are expensive (\$1622/visit) and often not appropriate. The best estimates are that the currently MRT/PACT can divert 77% of their calls from the Emergency room/hospitalization.
- Approximate cost - \$3.83 million

ASK: The Alberta Government adopts trauma-informed practices and approaches across all appropriate ministries, departments and service offerings.

- Trauma-informed practices are based on the latest brain science and lead us to change our perspective from blame, to asking, what happened to you to lead to acting this way?
- 56% of all Albertans have experienced one or more adverse childhood experiences; 12 % have experienced four or more. This represents a high rate of people who have experienced trauma.
- The government of Alberta provides important social programs and community services. For some Albertans, their experience of trauma and the practices of agencies that are not trauma-informed, but re-traumatizing, create significant barriers for traumatized people to access services. (i.e. People needing counselling before and after engaging with Alberta works)
- Trauma-informed care – improves relationships between service providers and clients, increases client participation, hope for the future, housing stability, self-esteem and resiliency and decreases vulnerability, system dependence and demand for crisis services.
- Trauma-informed organizational culture reduces staff burnout, increases staff satisfaction and improves job performance
- The Alberta Government often requires agencies it funds to be trauma-informed. If this is of such value to require it of others, why doesn't it place this same requirement on itself?

Key Talking Points

Bill 1 and Bill 32

We are concerned about Bill 1 and 32 because of how they limit civic engagement in public life and thus threaten the vitality of our democracy. Bill 1 limits the ability of citizens to express dissent through protest, Bill 32 limits the ability of one segment of civil society, unions, from full participation in our democratic public life.

Bill 32:

- By requiring unions to have individual members opt-in to any union support of addressing social issues, charities or non-profit organizations, creates an administrative barrier that will prevent unions from being engaged in our shared public life.
- This administrative barrier will block unions from supporting charities and community efforts to address social issues. This will have a negative impact on charities and our communities.
- This Bill also interferes with the ability of unions to be democratically, self-governing organizations, with elected leadership that can make decisions.
- Hours of work averaging – will disproportionately impact economically marginalized families, who rely on overtime, in the face of low wages, to make ends meet.

Bill 1

- By defining critical infrastructure very broadly it means that almost any protest can be understood to contravene this law, in effect making protest illegal. (ie. Critical infrastructure includes roads, sidewalk driveways alley).
- The fine structure is so high (\$1,000 - \$25,000 for individuals and between \$10,000 and \$200,000 for organizations) that any lower-income person or organization representing them cannot take the risk to protest – creating a “chill effect for protest.” This disproportionately silences economically marginalized communities from ongoing participation in democratic public life and expression.
- The effect of silencing dissent expressed through protests reflects the values of undemocratic countries and does not reflect the democratic values and constitution of our province and nation. Alberta must not be turned into a banana republic where dissent is suppressed.