

Advocacy Arenas for Action

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Elected officials, both at the federal and state level, are poised to be the key decision makers in reshaping our health care system. It is important that your elected representatives are well informed about health care reform. There are many ways to communicate with lawmakers including phone calls, letter writing, e-mails, personal visits, testimony at public meetings and elected officials and social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook. Congress gets over 200 million e-mails a year so here are some guidelines for helping you get your message through the clutter!

- Use the following link to find your local legislator:
<https://www.congress.gov/members>
- Understand your legislators' point of view. Determine your voting district or state and go to www.thomas.gov or www.cqpress.com to learn about your elected representatives voting record, key committees and perspective on your topics of interests.
- Stay updated on the progress of a bill in Congress by using <https://www.govtrack.us/>

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Tips on Calling a Representative

1. Find your legislator's phone number. Use the online searchable directory at <https://congress.gov/members> or call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202)224-3121 and ask for your legislator's office.
2. Telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member, not the member of Congress. Ask to speak with the staff member who handles the issue about which you wish to comment. Don't be disappointed about speaking with a staffer they are very knowledgeable about their topics and often very influential as well.
3. Identify yourself by name and the organization that you represent or the voting district from which you are calling.
4. Explain to the staffer you would like to leave a brief message, such as: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) I am calling to support/oppose House Bill: HB____, Senate Bill: SB____."
5. State the reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Be polite and concise. Creating 1 or 2 talking points will focus on the content of your message. Too much information may confuse your message.
6. Request a written response to your phone call if you did not speak to your legislative member.
7. Respond if the legislator requires further information, provide it as soon as possible.

www.5calls.org is an easy tool to contact your Congressional representative.

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Tips on Writing Elected Officials

Individual letters to members of Congress, governors, state legislators and local elected officials do make a difference. A letter is a good way to call attention to an issue. Most Members of Congress and other elected officials respond to constituents' correspondence. Just a few letters can have an impact. You can also write one letter and have several constituents sign the letter or create an online petition circulate it through your social networks asking your connections for signatures or financial support.

Address the letter and envelope properly.

The envelope should be addressed to:

The Honorable _____ The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515 Washington, D.C. 20510.

www.democracy.io is an easy tool to send a letter to your Congressional representative.

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Tips for a Congressional Visit

Before the Visit

- Understand your legislators' point of view. Familiarize yourself with the member of Congress (e.g. district or state, voting record, key committees) www.thomas.gov or www.cqpress.com.
- Decide what you want to accomplish prior to the meeting. If your legislator supports your position, thank them for their support and ask them to take a lead role in recruiting other legislators to supporting the issue. If the legislator opposes your position determine how to best present different perspectives and experiences to appeal to your legislator.
- Review the background on the issues. Develop talking points and practice your presentation prior to the meeting to determine which points are most important and how much time you have to make them. Develop relevant stories for illustrating key points. Stories are more memorable than random facts and statistics. Construct a "leave behind" document.
- Designate a speaker who will "make the case" for each talking point and keep track of time. Upon arriving at the office, check how much time you will have and adjust accordingly.
- Be prompt, patient and flexible. It is not uncommon for legislators to be late. Meeting with a staff member is as important as meeting with the member of Congress. Staff are generally just as knowledgeable about the issues and have significant influence on the legislator. Staffers brief the legislator, write floor statements for debates, and draft legislation. You often have a longer discussion with staffers and time to ask them questions about the legislator's position. Give staffers the same information and respect you would give the elected official.

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Tips for a Congressional Visit During the Meeting

- Begin the meeting by thanking the member/staff. Thank them for taking the time to meet, state the purpose of the meeting and thank the member for a positive stance he or she might have taken on an issue.
- Introduce each member of the group. Include their name, relevant affiliations and city/state if you are a constituent.
- Explain why you have come to see them. Keep it simple and illustrate the impact of the legislation. Share your personal experience and highlight how the specific legislation would affect your work as a health care provider, the lives of your patients, and public health in general. Present the main points, implications of the legislation and the reason for your involvement.
- Be factual. Make sure you have cited resources for the information you are presenting.
- Make it local. Talk about how the issues will affect the legislators' district or state.
- Listen. You are there to learn how to be a more effective advocate for your cause. You will learn by listening to what they have to say about their position. Try to have a conversation with the member/staff and listen to what he/she is interested in or concerned about. Write down any information you learned about the member's position or concerns you may have from the meeting. Share this information with your members and use it to develop strategy for your next visit or follow up communication.

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Tips for a Congressional Visit During the Meeting Cont.

- **Ask.** Stay on message. Don't bring up individual requests. Make sure you have a specific ask that is specified in according to the appropriate house or senate bills for your congressional visits. Identify it accordingly, e.g., House bill: H. R. ____, Senate bill: S.____. Ask how they feel about the issue and ask directly for your legislator's commitment to vote on your side of the issue. Ask how you can help them move the issue. Some of the things you may ask your elected officials for is to introduce and/or support legislation, co-sponsor legislation and/or oppose efforts to introduce, change or reverse legislation.
- **Be responsive** and ready to answer questions or to provide more information. You do not need to know every answer. If you don't have an answer to a question, offer to research the information and get back to the office as soon as possible.
- **Give.** Leave a brief summary of the legislation addressed.
- **Thank.** At the end of the meeting, thank the legislator or staff for their time and willingness to listen. Invite them to meet with you back home in your district/state.
- **Exchange Contact Information.** Before leaving the office, ask for an email address or card so that you can stay in touch with a specific staff member. Leave your contact information and offer to serve as a resource on health care issues. Let him or her know that you are willing to provide information and statistics on the subject.

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Tips for a Congressional Visit After the Meeting

- **Take Notes.** Immediately following the meeting write down any information you learned about the member's positions or concerns you may have from the meeting. Share this information with your members and use it to develop strategy.
- **Assign Action Items.** Designate specific follow-up issues to specific members of the group in order to improve accountability.
- **Follow-up.** Every member of your group should send a thank you note reiterating your message/ask. In the letter, reiterate your key points and any commitments the member made to you. Include any follow-up information you promised to provide.