

THE ADVO-KIT

*Advocacy Tools for
the **Health Care for the Homeless**
Community*

NATIONAL
HEALTH CARE
for the
HOMELESS
COUNCIL

Advocacy is essential to the mission of HCH projects. With millions living without stable housing, health care and housing becoming less and less affordable, and wages that fail to cover even basic needs, **we understand that change is needed.** As a health care community that serves the most vulnerable patients, we see how public policies need to be altered to reduce poverty and prevent homelessness. Our experiences serve as a basis to educate others, especially with those who do not understand the link between housing, health care, homelessness, and poverty.

The Advo-Kit is a toolkit designed to aid staff, clients, administrators, board members and other community members in advocating for policy change. The strategies contained in the following chapters will give you the needed tools to hone your advocacy skills:

- **Advocacy: Defined and Demystified**
- **Integrating Service and Advocacy**
- **The Legislative Process**
- **HCH Advocacy in Action**
- **Successful Meetings with Legislators**
- **Administrative Advocacy**
- **Advocacy Through the Media**

There is a 'public arena' in which, in principle, individuals can participate in decisions that involve the general society: how public revenues are obtained and used, what foreign policy will be, etc...Democracy functions insofar as individuals can participate meaningfully in the public arena, meanwhile running their own affairs, individually and collectively, without illegitimate interference by concentrations of power. Functioning democracy presupposes relative equality in access to resources – material, informational, and other – a truism as old as Aristotle...

Noam Chomsky

Dedicated to Jeff Singer, the first Health Policy Advocate for the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, long time President and CEO of Health Care for the Homeless of Maryland, Inc., and tireless champion of social justice. Thank you for your commitment to advocacy and your unwavering conviction that everyone deserves quality health care, affordable housing, adequate income and the ability to participate in the decisions impacting their lives.



Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will – Frederick Douglas

SECTION 1

ADVOCACY: DEFINED AND DEMYSTIFIED

Advocacy has been essential to the mission of the National Health Care for the Homeless Council and HCH projects since their inception in 1985. HCH projects were founded with the assumption that the homelessness crisis of the 80s would be temporary but unfortunately this has not been the case. The stubbornness of modern homelessness only redoubles the need for advocacy to make homelessness rare and brief.

Defining Advocacy

We often use the term "advocacy" as if we all had a clear understanding of what is meant by the word or what it means to "do advocacy." Particularly among those who consider themselves professional "advocates," little attention is paid to defining the term. At the same time, the word often carries with it a certain mystique. Sometimes we think that it must take something extra special to do this thing called advocacy. **In reality, advocacy is quite basic – and we have been doing it our entire lives.**

As human beings, we have been advocating since we were capable of crying for food, and we only get better at it as we age. We justified why we needed an increase in our allowance, we gave impassioned pleas for extending our bedtime, and outlined all the reasons we should be allowed to borrow the car. The instinct has become even more ingrained as adults; negotiating for the best price, providing advice to a friend, and other day-to-day advocacy has become second nature.

This comfort with advocacy has extended into our professional lives as well whether we realize it or not. Employees of HCH projects have long advocated on behalf of individual clients.

Defining Advocacy is often overlooked but can be a helpful place to start.

To advocate (verb): To speak or write in favor of; support or urge by argument; recommend publicly

Advocate (noun): A person who speaks or writes in support or defense of a person or cause

You are in fact "doing advocacy" whenever you:

- **Call a shelter** to explain why a client's mental illness should not keep her from having a place to stay
- **Ask that a hospital social worker** develop a discharge plan that is more attentive to the needs of your disabled client
- **Call the Department of Social Services** to clarify a client's Medicaid eligibility
- **Explain to a friend** the realities of poverty and homelessness

Sounds familiar, right? Well, consider these situations:

- **In navigating the Disability Determination Service** you realize that it is too complex for most individuals with cognitive deficits to understand on their own.
- **When scrambling to maintain a client's benefits** you realize renewal forms are frequently sent to addresses your clients can't access.
- **After making numerous attempts to find specialty care for your patients**, you realize no provider will see someone who is uninsured.
- **When searching for housing** you realize that there are no shelters for intact families in your community.
- **While listening to the news** you hear your local mayor discussing housing policy with no reference to low-income renters.



Unfortunately, these are also familiar situations, but consider the differences. The first set of situations focuses upon helping achieve change for specific individuals. The second set highlights the need for broader change—or what we call “policy advocacy.”



Defining Policy Advocacy

When we recognize **problems in the system** that make it harder for our clients to qualify for services, navigate processes, or improve their circumstances, we want to see solutions put into place. The act of making a problem known, suggesting alternatives, and helping policy makers select the best solution is known as “policy advocacy.” The following are principles of policy advocacy at the National HCH Council:

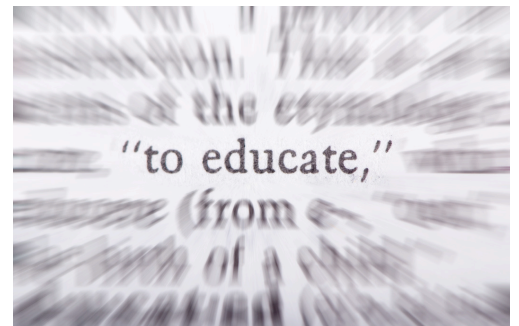
Advocacy is educational. Contrary to stereotypes, effective advocacy does not require political clout or campaign contributions. Instead, advocacy is an educational process between lawmakers and their constituents. Most policy makers are unaware of the issues faced by homeless individuals and do not have personal experience with the programs and systems designed to assist them. Hence, they may be unaware of the problem and/or the actions they can take to be part of the solution. It is our job to educate them.

Advocacy is sharing experiences. While statistics and studies are important, real life experiences are often more compelling. Providers and consumers both have experienced issues of poverty and homelessness first hand. Their stories can effectively demonstrate the need for policy change.

Advocacy is focused on public policy. While a sympathetic story can be compelling, the ultimate goal is to illustrate the need for changes in public policy. It is important to maintain focus upon systemic issues and structural solutions. Policy makers will guide you to the right people, and as you develop relationships, you’ll learn who can be most helpful in achieving the policy change you seek.

Another way of thinking about policy advocacy is the Council’s formal definition:

*“Policy advocacy is the **educational** process through which **experience, data, and insight** are shared with those who craft **public policy** so that they may make informed decisions.”*



*Contemporary homelessness is the product of conscious **social and economic policy decisions** that have retreated from a commitment to ensuring basic life necessities for all people.*

from the National Health Care for the Homeless Council Statement of Principles

Advocacy is about building relationships. We practice individual advocacy by relying upon our relationships. For example, referring a patient to a specialist with whom you have worked in the past is easier than referring to someone you don't know. Policy advocacy is no different. A policy maker who is unfamiliar with you or your organization likely will be less responsive than one who knows and trusts you. Reach out and build relationships with relevant officials just as you would with providers in your clinical work. Invest the time needed to establish these relationships.

Advocacy should focus upon universal solutions, but expect incremental progress. The goal of policy advocacy within the context of HCH is to make homelessness rare and brief. Stay focused on macro-level solutions such as universal access to quality health care, affordable housing, and livable incomes, but understand that public policy change is usually achieved through a series of smaller and more incremental steps.

Have a bias toward action—let's see something happen now. You can break that big plan into small steps and take the first step right away

—Indira Gandhi

UPSTREAM THINKING

As writer and ecologist Sandra Steingraber explains through the following parable, it is important to think upstream and consider the conditions creating the crisis . . .

The residents of a remote village along a winding river began noticing increasing numbers of drowning people caught in the river's swift current and so went to work inventing progressively more elaborate technologies to rescue them. So preoccupied were these heroic villagers with rescue and treatment that they never thought to look upstream to see who was pushing the victims into the river.



Next Steps

With a clearer understanding of policy and advocacy, you are ready to explore concrete ways to effectively integrate advocacy into your daily work. It is not as hard as you think.

We create lasting solutions to homelessness by addressing not only emergency needs, but also by dealing with the underlying issues facing our clients and communities – John Parvensky, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

SECTION 2

INTEGRATING SERVICE AND ADVOCACY

Knowing about advocacy and why it is important is an essential first step, but how does it fit into your daily work and within your project? The National HCH Council recommends using your expertise at the clinical level to promote needed policy changes – the integration of service and advocacy. In this section we will illustrate the natural relationship HCH providers and consumers have with advocacy, offer strategies for overcoming common challenges, and suggest ways to integrate advocacy in HCH projects.

WHO SHOULD “DO ADVOCACY”?

Everyone should do advocacy. It takes neither special training nor immense preparation. In fact, it is an integral part of a well-functioning democracy. We have a responsibility to share our knowledge and experience to help public officials make better decisions about policies that have a direct impact on HCH staff and consumers. Indeed, those in the HCH community are powerful and natural advocates:

HCH projects hold immense credibility: As local employers and service providers, HCH projects are integral to their communities. Physicians, nurses, social workers, administrators, front line staff—these positions lend credibility to our advocacy through the services we provide. Because we work every day with those most directly impacted by failed public policies, our experience brings a level of authenticity that cannot be ignored. We are not hired lobbyists—the difference is significant.

HCH staff and consumers are subject matter experts: Administrators, clinicians, and others in the HCH community have made homeless health care their profession and are all too familiar with the relationship between poverty and health. Providers and consumers themselves have the direct experience needed to convey the negative consequences of life on the street. We are the experts about the solutions to homelessness.

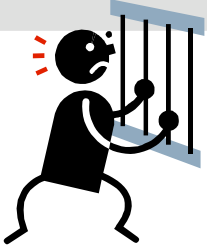
HCH staff and consumers have real world experience: Even when public policies are crafted with the best intentions, unintended consequences often result. Policy makers can easily miss the actual impact of their decisions upon real people. HCH staff and clients have first hand observations. Such “intel from the field” is invaluable for policy makers—they want and need this information.

- ✓ Advocacy is **appropriate to the mission** of HCH and has other benefits, too.
- ✓ Advocacy can **prevent staff burnout** by providing a change in routine and a greater vision of our mission.
- ✓ Advocacy can also **raise the profile** of your organization and result in **additional funding opportunities**.

Overcoming Common Challenges

In spite of the strengths and benefits of HCH advocacy there are several actual or perceived challenges that must be overcome. Thankfully these issues can be overcome with a small amount of staff education, administrative support, and “buy in” from your project’s leadership.

Is it legal to engage in policy advocacy?



Yes, it is legal for nonprofits to engage in policy advocacy. In fact, it is essential since nonprofits often represent the issues and populations that have little voice in the public discourse.

First of all, a distinction should be made between advocacy and lobbying. Much of what HCH advocates do is not considered lobbying. Lobbying is an activity defined by law as urging public officials to support or oppose legislation. For example, urging the public to contact their representative in support/opposition of specific legislation is considered lobbying. This is an allowable activity, but there are limits on the amount of lobbying a non-profit organization like an HCH project can engage in, and these limits will be defined below. **There are no limits on education** or other types of communication with public officials, and much of the advocacy done at HCH projects is unrelated to specific legislation.

The IRS does limit 501(c)(3) organizations (e.g., non-profits, like most HCH projects) in lobbying activities. Only an ‘insubstantial part’ of their time can be spent lobbying as defined by one of two tests: the *insubstantial part test* and the *501(h) expenditure test*. The IRS defaults to the insubstantial part test, generally defined as no more than 5% of an organization’s time and resources devoted to lobbying. If an organization chooses to, it can elect to be assessed using the 501(h) expenditure test. This allows 20% of expenditures to be spent on lobbying but does require reporting (e.g. \$1 million spent on lobbying for a project with a budget of \$5 million, a limit highly unlikely to be reached). More details can be found here <http://www.abanet.org/buslaw/blt/2009-03-04/mehta.shtml> but suffice it to say that yes, you and others at your project can and should engage in advocacy.

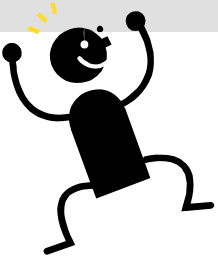
I don’t have enough time.



Advocacy is not time-intensive and can be integrated into your daily work. It does not take much time to make a phone call or attend an external meeting or community forum from time to time. Advocacy can also be a part of your clinical work by involving consumers. Advocacy is empowering and can even be clinically helpful.

It is important to note that HCH administrators and policy staff should not be the only ones participating in advocacy. Direct service staff are essential (even preferred) to reinforce the direct experience and credibility behind HCH advocacy.

I cannot make a difference.

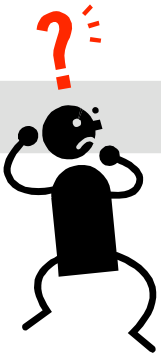


Remaining optimistic, especially when one is working with difficult social and economic problems up close and personal everyday is challenging, but the challenges are the same in clinical work. Just as in clinical work, self-care, supervision, and other activities are needed to prevent burn out.

Keep in mind that speaking up and advocating publicly is needed to help balance the public discussion and ensure that the perspective and needs of low-income people are included. Advocacy is needed so that public officials have all the information needed to make an informed decision about public matters, not just the information provided by wealthy and powerful private interests.

And remember, advocacy works (though often it takes a while). Similar to clinical progress, policy advocacy can be incremental and full of relapse, but it is possible to achieve progress through constant engagement and never giving up. History is full of examples of small groups overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds.

I do not understand the issues.



Advocacy is about education. You do not need to know the details of Medicaid laws and regulations or the Social Security Act in order to engage in advocacy. Simply tell your story, explain what you see everyday, and offer your ideas for solutions to the problems you've identified. This is the HCH advocacy approach, and what policy makers want to hear. Leave the legalese for the lawyers.

My organization is not “an advocacy organization.”



Advocacy and direct service go hand in hand; advocacy is not something extra. The mission of our agencies is not simply to treat the present and immediate health care needs of our clients, but to improve our clients' health overall. There is only so much we can do without changing the larger system. Advocacy is also needed to promote your organization to ensure ongoing funding and expansion opportunities.

Biting the hand that feeds.



There is no conflict between receiving public funding and engaging in advocacy. Public funding sources are limited, hence government agencies needs to hear from the projects it funds about what works and what could be improved. Advocacy does not have to be critical—it should be an ongoing relationship built around a constructive dialogue focused on solutions to problems. Building a strong relationship with the agencies that fund your program through advocacy and communicating regularly can help those agencies see you as a partner and a resource.

Integration in Action: Steps You Can Take

Advocacy requires action. There are many concrete steps you and others at your project can take to integrate service and advocacy:

- ❖ **Incorporate a commitment to advocacy into the agency's mission statement.** If you haven't already done so, discuss adding advocacy to the agency's mission statement at an upcoming board meeting. Include your board members in advocacy activities as well.
- ❖ **Establish an advocacy or government relations committee.** Include board members, providers, leadership, front-line staff, and consumers on the committee. Establish an annual advocacy agenda based on active issues in your community.
- ❖ **Include advocacy in the job descriptions of service providers.** For example, a service provider's job might include representing the agency on an external task force, attending a number of City/County Council meetings, or reserving a set number of hours to dedicate toward advocacy.
- ❖ **Incorporate advocacy issues into new staff orientation.** Educate new staff about the relevant local, state, and national policy concerns and advocacy initiatives that directly influence the work of the agency, and discuss how they will be involved in these activities.
- ❖ **Create tangible opportunities for staff and clients to directly engage in advocacy.** Scheduling an annual "Advocacy Day" in the state capital (or local county seat) or a public rally around a specific issue are two examples. Staff and consumers should participate so they can meet with policymakers and tell their unique story.
- ❖ **Recognize the advocacy efforts of staff and clients.** Celebrate participation in advocacy and the positive policy changes that occur in the same way you would recognize meeting significant client/program goals and achievements. A public statement of recognition can be very rewarding, bolster staff morale, and demonstrate the organization's commitment to advocacy.
- ❖ **Facilitate staff and client participation in external advocacy coalitions.** Plan work and clinical schedules to allow for specific staff to represent the agency on external boards, committees, work groups, and coalitions.
- ❖ **Subscribe to the HCH Mobilizer.** The National HCH Council provides periodic email alerts and updates on national policy matters through the HCH Mobilizer, which contain straightforward actions to take on key policy matters. Sign up at <http://www.nhchc.org/mobilizer.html> and distribute it to clients, staff and board members. Take action and encourage others at your organization to do the same.
- ❖ **Become an Individual Member of the National HCH Council.** The Council offers FREE individual memberships, which include publications, trainings, and opportunities to be involved in many aspects of the national HCH community. The Council also has a Policy Committee, which actively engages on the national, state and local issues requiring HCH advocacy and policy development. Please join us at <http://www.nhchc.org/membership.html>.



Next Steps

These concrete steps can go a long way to integrating advocacy into your daily work and bringing your expertise to bear on policy issues. In the next section we will provide a "Congressional 101" to help you understand the legislative process, target your efforts and develop strategies for your advocacy.

Government of the people, by the people, for the people... – Abraham Lincoln

SECTION 3 THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Generally speaking, the policies governing various public systems stem directly or indirectly from the laws passed by legislative bodies, implemented by administrative entities, and interpreted by the courts. Those interested in influencing public policy should have a basic understanding how laws are crafted and passed. The national and state legislative processes — determining “how a bill becomes a law” — are similar, relatively straightforward, and filled with many opportunities along the way to influence the outcome. This section of the Advo-Kit provides a “Congressional 101” overview, a brief step-by-step primer on how a bill becomes a law, a list of key Congressional Committees, a description of the budget process, and some notes on state-level processes.

Congress 101: Structure, Members & Control

Structure: As the legislative body at the Federal level, The U.S. Congress is made up of two chambers: the House of Representatives (the House) and the Senate. The House has 435 members, each serving two-year terms. The number of representatives from each state is determined by the state’s population. The Senate has 100 members, two from each state, who serve six-year terms that are staggered (so that one third of the Senate is up for re-election every two years).

Members: While nearly all members of Congress belong to one of the two dominant political parties (the Democratic Party or the Republican Party), the partisan affiliation of a particular Member of Congress does not always predict how that individual will vote on a given issue. Homeless services and health centers historically have been supported by both dominant parties (as well as by less prominent political parties and independents), so do not despair if your elected officials have a different political orientation than you do—there are still many opportunities to find common ground. Party affiliation is important because members often are encouraged by party leadership to vote with other members of the party (called ‘voting along party lines’). Sometimes members of both parties will join together on a specific issue as a way of making it more popular among both parties (called bipartisanship).

Control: The House and the Senate have different ways of dividing power and control. In the House, the Majority Party (the party with the most seats) determines which bills get a hearing, what amendments can be offered, and when a vote can be taken. The Minority Party does not have many opportunities to get bills considered without some help from the Majority. Most importantly, a bill in the House can be passed with a simple majority vote, so the Majority Party does not need any support from the Minority Party if the vote is along party lines.

In the Senate, any Member can introduce a bill or amendments, but, at the same time, any Member also can block a bill from coming to a vote. Hence, each individual Senator has a significant amount of individual power. Various rules govern how hearings and testimony will proceed, but at least 60 votes are required to pass legislation. Because of these differences in procedure, the majority party generally has much more power in the House, and a “super majority” of 60 Senators is needed to pass legislation in the Senate – often requiring some degree of bipartisan support. These considerations are important in developing an advocacy strategy.

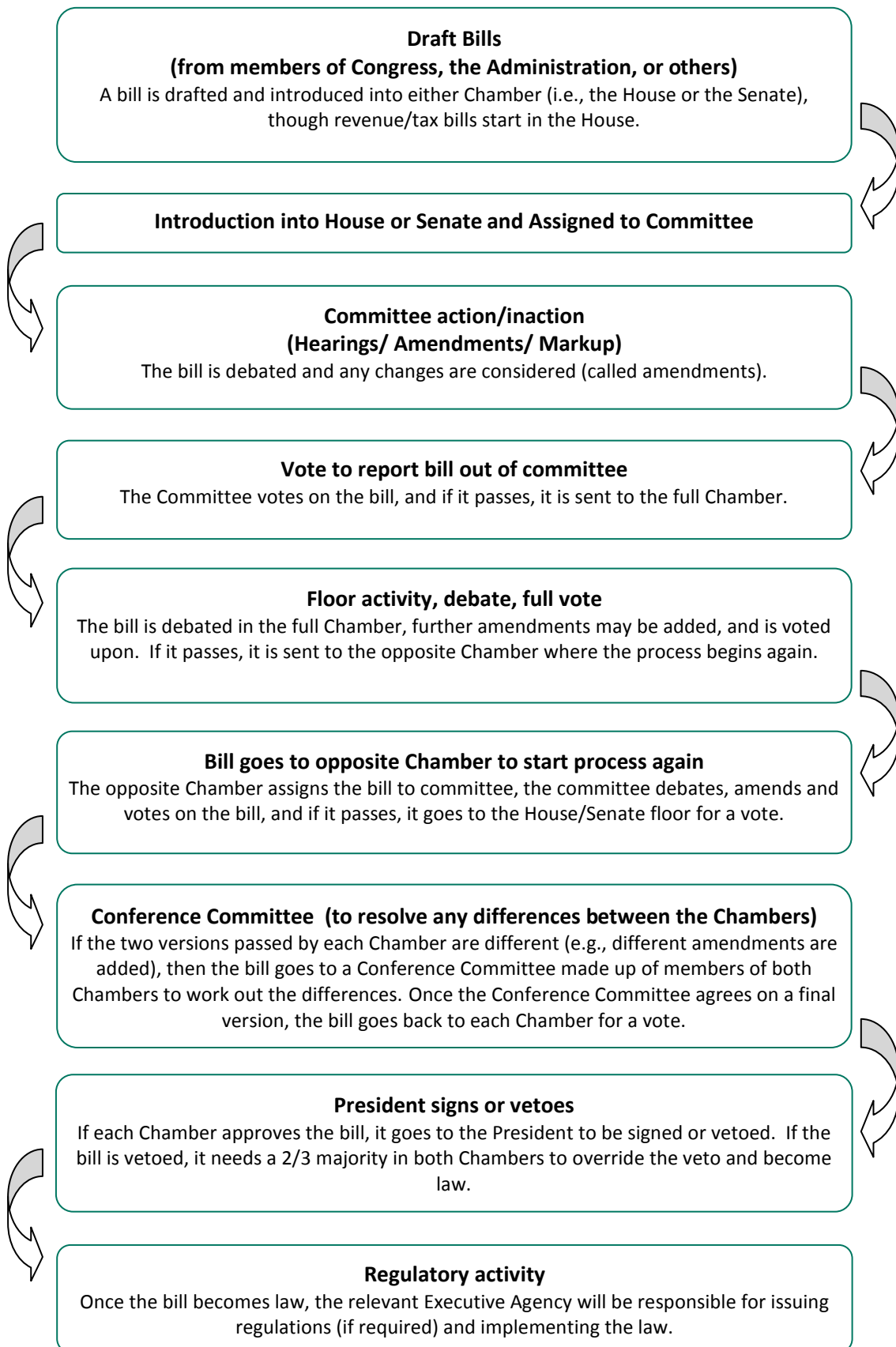
How a Bill Becomes Law

The Constitution sets up a system of “checks and balances” to ensure that no one area of government – Executive, Legislative, or Judicial – has undue power. Power is divided similarly within the Legislative branch between the two houses (or “Chambers”) of Congress – the House and the Senate. While there are a myriad of specific rules for certain circumstances, the basic process for considering and passing legislation remains the same and is outlined in figure 1.

While this lengthy, multi-step process allows for the careful consideration of public policy, it also provides many opportunities for conflict, compromise, and even confusion. If a bill fails at any step along the way, it does not become law. The earlier you engage in advocacy, the better. Ideally, meet with Members of the Committee considering the legislation you wish to influence. Nonetheless, don’t underestimate the importance of broader Congressional education. Any time is a good time to educate your legislators about the issues important to you and those you represent.



Figure 1. The Lawmaking Process



Committee Structure

Each Chamber of Congress is divided into many committees and subcommittees, each with specific authority (called “jurisdiction”) over specific issues. Those most important to the HCH community are listed below:

- **House and Senate Appropriations:** allocates funding for most health and housing programs
- **House Ways and Means:** jurisdiction over taxes, tax provisions of Medicare and Medicaid, Social Security disability payments, unemployment payments, TANF, and Food Stamps
- **Senate Finance:** similar to House Ways and Means with jurisdiction over taxes but also jurisdiction over all provisions of Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and other income supports
- **House Energy and Commerce:** jurisdiction over health center legislation, Medicare and Medicaid structure and policy, and health insurance markets
- **Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP):** similar to House Energy and Commerce with jurisdiction over health center legislation but no jurisdiction over Medicaid/Medicare
- **House Financial Services:** jurisdiction over affordable housing programs, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and housing finance
- **Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs:** similar to House Financial Services

The Chair of each committee has a great deal of influence over other committee members and the issues the group will consider. Gaining a committee Chair’s support is critical to any advocacy effort that falls under the jurisdiction of a given committee. The “Ranking Member” on the committee is the highest ranking member of the minority party. While this individual’s power is limited (especially in the House), obtaining minority support for a proposal nonetheless can be advantageous.

Budget Process

Many of the policy positions taken by the HCH community address established programs that prevent and end homelessness. Hence, the budgets for the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Education, and other agencies are vitally important. The process for passing the federal budget is a little different than that used for non-budgetary legislation.

The federal government is required to determine funding levels for most programs each fiscal year, which runs from October 1 through September 30. Spending for some programs (such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid) is considered mandatory and does not require Congressional approval each year. Most other programs (to include health centers, housing programs, and block grants) are considered discretionary and must be funded annually.

Process: The budget process begins with the Administration (the President) submitting to Congress a budget proposal for the upcoming fiscal year. This generally happens in early February (see Figure 2). The proposal reflects the President’s fiscal and policy priorities, but the House and Senate will have their own ideas as well. Sometimes funding levels or specific programs from the President’s proposal are carried over into the House and/or Senate versions, and sometimes the President’s ideas are rejected. Congress will hold hearings and pass “Budget Resolutions,” which are statements of principles and funding targets. Though often confused by the general public with the actual budget, “Budget Resolutions” declare the intent of Congress but do not have the force of law.

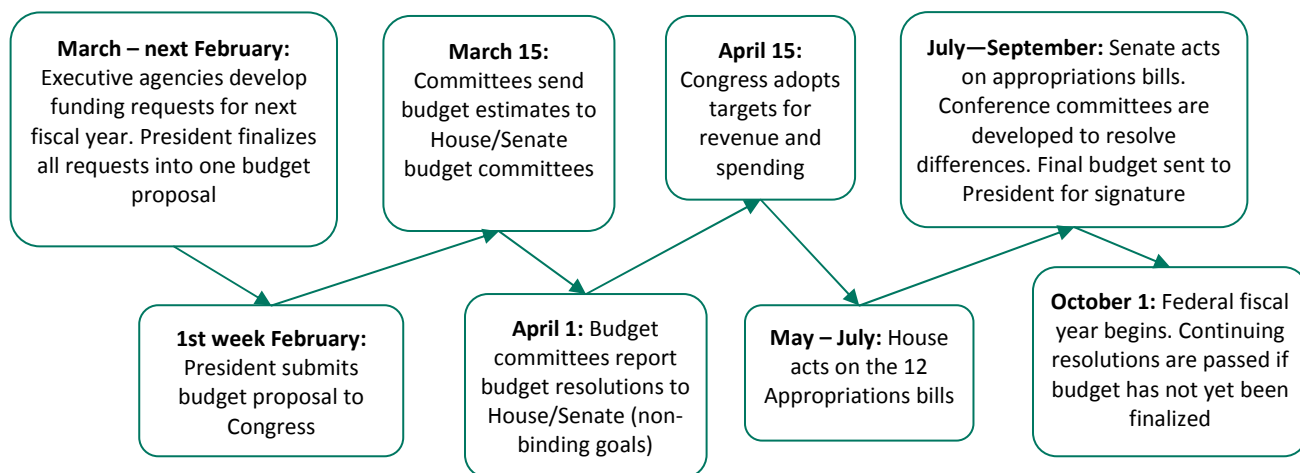
Decision-making: The legally binding funding levels are not determined until both the Senate and House vote on the Appropriations Bills passed out of Subcommittees. Two of these Subcommittees are especially important for the HCH community:

- **Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (Labor – H):** Subcommittee which governs health and human service programs (like health centers)
- **Transportation – Housing and Urban Development (T – HUD):** Subcommittee which governs housing programs

Final funding levels for federal programs are derived from a combination of the President’s Budget proposal, the Budget Resolutions passed by the House and Senate, requests by other members, testimony at hearings, and constituent feedback. At this point in the process, Appropriations Bills follow a structure very similar to that used for other bills – from the subcommittee to the full committee to the full Chamber. Once each Chamber has passed its version, a Conference Committee is established to work out the differences, and the agreed-upon version is submitted back to each Chamber for a final vote. Once appropriations bills are passed, they are sent to the President for signature.

Simple, right? Not quite.

Figure 2. The Federal Budget Process



Going into Overtime: This entire process is intended to be completed prior to October 1, the start of the fiscal year. Should the Senate and House not reach agreement, they may issue a “Continuing Resolution,” which keeps the government funded for a specified time at the previous year’s levels. Failure to pass a budget or adopt a Continuing Resolution could lead to a “government shutdown,” as resources are no longer available to fund certain government operations.

State and Local Legislatures

State level policy decisions also are incredibly important. Each state legislature operates slightly differently, but the general structure is similar. Like at the national level, committees are very important as are leadership positions. Generally, both Houses must pass a bill and get the Governor’s signature in order for something to become law. Also, legislative and budgetary matters follow separate processes. For more information on your particular state legislature, the National Conference of State Legislatures is a good central resource with information for each state (see www.ncsl.org/?tabid=17173).

Key considerations when working at the state or local level:

- ❖ Most state legislatures do not meet year-round. Determine when yours is in session.
- ❖ Nearly all states are required to have a balanced budget.
- ❖ Medicaid is jointly funded by the federal government and states. Despite this partnership, Medicaid remains one of the largest budget items for all states.
- ❖ States have many options to expand eligibility and services within their Medicaid programs and often are the best targets of your Medicaid-related advocacy efforts.
- ❖ Education, criminal justice, disability assistance, mental health, and substance abuse services fall mostly within the jurisdiction of states.
- ❖ At the local level, Housing Authorities, jails and detention centers, and local health initiatives are all ideal subjects for policy advocacy.
- ❖ Party affiliation remains important, although less so than at the federal level.
- ❖ State and local level officials often are more accessible than federal officials. Build effective working relationships with them.



Next Steps

Hopefully this information has oriented you to the Legislative Process. Section 4 of the Advo-Kit provides strategies for developing your advocacy plan and putting that plan into **ACTION**.

Hope is a state of mind, not of the world. Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously heading for success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good – Vaclav Havel

SECTION 4 HCH ADVOCACY IN ACTION

In order to achieve positive change in society, we need to take the first step. The noblest arguments and the most insightful analysis are made more effective when individuals and communities are organized to translate words into action. This section of the Advo-Kit provides specific strategies to maximize the effects of your advocacy.

Develop a Plan

You wouldn't build a house without a blueprint. You wouldn't treat your client's illness without following established clinical guidelines. Advocacy is no different, and, thankfully, it's much less complicated than engineering or medicine. The following steps will help you (and your colleagues) focus your advocacy work.

Identify key issues.

Through your daily endeavors, you've developed first-hand knowledge of what works well, what could work better, and what *really* doesn't work at all. Use your experience to pinpoint where you want to focus your energy. Formal avenues for staff and client feedback, such as surveys or focus groups, can help identify agency-wide advocacy issues.

You have support!
The National HCH Council policy and advocacy page www.nhchc.org/Advocacy contains dozens of publications on current policy issues and recommendations. Use this information to inform your advocacy priorities remain up-to-date on policy developments.

Identify solutions.

While it's often helpful to point out systemic problems, it's even better to prepare yourself with specific solutions. Determine what common sense changes would make programs work better for those they are intended to serve. Identify "bright spots" that policymakers might use as a model.

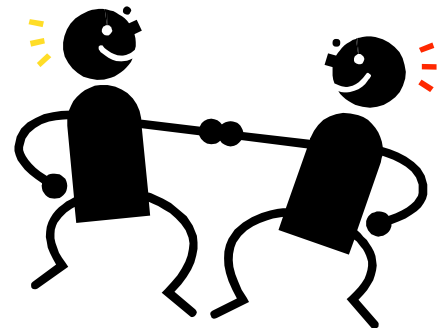
Identify key players.

Quite likely, many individuals or organizations already are involved in any issue you choose for your advocacy: other agencies that do similar work, politicians, public employees, or people in the community who recognize the need for policy change. Do your research, and reach out to form alliances. Public officials or community stakeholders that strongly agree with your position can be important resources for your efforts. It's equally important to identify potential opponents and develop answers to their arguments.

Which policymakers are best positioned to advance your issue? In some cases, you might know the Chair of the appropriate legislative committee and can get in touch with that office directly. In other instances it may take longer to know where to go. Policy decisions rarely rest with just one person, but certainly some legislators are more influential than others (see Advo-Kit section 3 for more information). Contact those you already know and work from there. Ask them to recommend other points of contact and to help arrange introductions.

Build relationships ahead of time.

Don't wait until there's a crisis to contact public officials. Make the effort to establish relationships now. Contact the office of your legislator to introduce yourself and your project. Express appreciation for any past support. Inform the office of relevant news articles or events. Invite lawmakers to attend tours or other events at your organization. Simple communication can establish rapport and trust that will pay dividends in the future.



Make use of what gets attention.

External events – planned or unexpected – often open windows of opportunity for policy change. Perhaps a news story points out the dysfunction of particular program or highlights a local family in need. Maybe a local organization releases a new report or the legislature holds a hearing about a particular problem. If an issue of interest is suddenly hot in your area, jump on it as a way to advance your priority issues.

Put the Plan into Action

Advocacy can take many forms depending on your time, resources and goals. The following provides strategies and considerations for some common advocacy activities.

Write to your elected official.

Actual mail sent to public officials is often delayed for weeks due to screening, so submit your letter by email or fax (you can find this information on their websites). Be clear and succinct in your letter: identify who you are, that you live in his or her district, the issue or legislation that you are concerned with, the action you request, and the rationale for your request. You generally do not want to go over a page. Using any statistics you may have and personal stories in your letter will be most compelling, as will providing information on the impact of the issue or legislation in the official's district. Use the sample letter in figure 1 to guide you.

Call your elected official.

Do not be intimidated by the prospect of calling your representative's office. Your opinion as a constituent is incredibly important and it is taken very seriously.

Begin your call by introducing yourself and indicating you are a constituent in his/her district. Briefly explain the purpose of your call and ask for the appropriate staff person who handles that issue. . (Note: staff are key allies in developing relationships so get to know them, and do not expect to speak with the member directly). Describe your issue to the staff person, your position, and your request and gauge how much more information is needed based on his/her response. From here, the conversation

Find your legislator by calling the Capitol Switchboard toll-free at 1 (877) 210-5351 or by going to www.house.gov or www.senate.gov. Save the number in your phone and bookmark your Representatives' pages!

If you would like to email Congressional Staff, do not ask for the email directly. Offices often will not give this information out. Instead, ask them to spell the name of the staff and use the following standard formats to determine the email address.

House of Representatives:

firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov

Senate:

firstname_lastname@

lastname of senator.senate.gov

may develop into a longer one, or it may be over in a few minutes. If there is no policy staff available, leaving a voicemail or a message with the receptionist is appropriate, although you should follow up within a day or two.

Invite a public official to tour your project.

The services provided by your project are invaluable to the community and will be compelling to policy makers—make sure they can see your work for themselves. A tour of your facility is a very effective way to demonstrate the positive impact of your project as well as highlight barriers to access and unmet need.

To invite a policy maker to a tour, contact the official's office. Each office has its own process for formal invitations but the receptionist (or staff person you've gotten to know) can provide the needed information. A formal invitation letter that includes an agenda is generally acceptable but make sure to check with the office and work with their schedule.

The visit agenda should be tailored to the issues you want to discuss, the services you provide, and the official's time constraints. As you walk through your project, introduce members of your staff and describe the work they do, making sure to highlight relevant policy issues and any problems you are having providing services to your clients. Invite relevant staff and consumers to join you for a discussion and allow for questions. Depending on time, a formal presentation of accomplishments, issues, or experiences by stakeholders at your project can also be effective. Most importantly: Ensure a policy discussion during the site visit. The tour is an excellent way to build a relationship, but it is also an opportunity to come back to identifying key issues: what is working well, what could be working better, and what is *really* not working at all.

Testify at a public hearing.

There are many opportunities at the state and local level to testify publicly. Public hearings on proposed legislation are common and easy to join. Determine when and where these hearings are held and try to make the time for them. Often hearings are published in local newspapers or on

Consumers make excellent advocates!

An individual currently or formerly experiencing homelessness commands credibility on the issues of homelessness that simply cannot be replicated. Facilitating consumer involvement is also empowering, clinically helpful, and consistent with the principles of self-determination. HCH projects should provide the support needed to include consumers in the activities listed throughout this section, such as opportunities to learn about policy issues, assistance in writing letters or testimony, and transportation.



legislative websites, or advocacy groups may circulate a notice. They can be an excellent opportunity to publicly advocate directly to government officials in a formal setting. Being present to counter the testimony of potential opponents is also critical. If you are unable to attend in person, consider submitting written testimony ahead of time.

Comment on proposed regulations.

Many laws require executive agencies to develop regulations that provide further detail on how programs will be implemented. These regulations are often overlooked opportunities, but can be equally important as laws themselves. Regulations are published in a formal registry by the relevant agency and are followed by a comment period during which the public can voice concerns. Signing up to receive emails from relevant agencies can help you stay informed about upcoming regulations. Take advantage of the opportunity to comment formally if regulations impacting your project or your clients are released.

Develop or join coalitions.

Working together with other organizations is an effective way of maximizing impact, being efficient with time, and combining a wide range of expertise. Join forces with local homeless coalitions, poverty advocates, and health care advocates and communicate with policy makers as a group. If there are no such coalitions in your area, establish one and invite other like-minded organizations to join you.

Distribute a petition.

Petitions can be quite effective, both to gauge public opinion and to organize consumers who may not have the resources to engage in other forms of advocacy. A thousand signatures can certainly get an official's attention, especially on the local level.

Organize a voter registration drive.

Many of the people served by our project (and some of the staff) are not registered to vote. The result is that their voice is often not considered by public officials. Many consumers are unsure if they are even eligible to vote. An organized voter registration drive can combat this. Consumers make very effective volunteers for the registration drive and can empower others to remain active in advocacy. As a non-profit organization, do not provide explicit support for a candidate or specific legislation, but there are no restrictions on facilitating voter registration.

Note: 501(c)(3) organizations cannot explicitly endorse candidates and have limits on endorsing specific legislation. But there is **no restriction on voter registration or on educating people about issues.**

Mobilize others.

Homeless service providers are not the only community members concerned about social policy. Many of our friends, family, and neighbors have similar beliefs and many others have not thought much about the issue. Take the time to discuss advocacy issues in your community and forward information and action alerts to those who are interested.

Sign up for *The Mobilizer* to stay informed and receive action alerts on advocacy opportunities!
www.nhchc.org/mobilizer.html

Figure 1. Sample letter to elected official

Dear Congressman Van Hollen:

My name is Mary Smith. I am a constituent in your district and an outreach worker at a federally qualified health center (FQHC). Our clinic provides medical care and behavioral health services to individuals experiencing homelessness throughout Maryland – services critical to all areas of the state.

I am writing today to urge you to oppose cuts to Medicaid and health centers, which are currently being considered as part of deficit reduction. These programs not only provide needed services but also help reduce federal and state expenditures on health care, and are very cost-efficient programs. Any reductions in federal funding only pass these costs onto states, beneficiaries, and providers, and ultimately make it more difficult for people to remain stable in health, employment and housing.

Medicaid and health centers are essential to a wide range of individuals and families. Through my work, I see the great difficulties my uninsured patients have obtaining access to specialty care, surgery, and other basic services that we cannot provide in a primary care setting. I also see many more people coming to us for services, but we simply don't have the resources to meet the current need. Please help health centers continue to provide these services and ensure that Medicaid remains a strong program.

I appreciate your past support of health centers and Medicaid and am hoping this support will continue. Reducing our deficit is important but we cannot do so by cutting programs that are literally saving the lives of people in our communities. As a health center employee, my job, my patients, and the health of my community depend on continued federal support. Please oppose any cuts to health centers or Medicaid and use your leadership position to encourage your colleagues to do the same. Thanks so much.

Mary Smith
123 Main Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
(410) 555-1212



Next Steps

Now that you have a plan in mind, let's put it into action by contacting a key policymaker. Section 5 of the Advo-Kit will give you helpful tips on how to schedule, prepare for, and conduct a successful meeting.

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

SECTION 5 SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS WITH LEGISLATORS

Phone calls and emails have their place, but nothing beats an old fashioned face-to-face meeting. In this section we will discuss how to set up effective meetings with your elected representatives. We have included tips for making and preparing for your appointments, conducting the meetings, and following up afterwards.

Before the Meeting

SCHEDULING

On the federal level you can meet with the staff of your Congress Members in Washington or at their home offices (most Members have multiple offices in their home districts). For a local meeting, call the district office closest to you (this is generally found on the Member's website) and ask to speak with the staff in charge of scheduling. They can tell you when the Member will be back in the district. Call well in advance if you would like to meet with the Member in person, but you are most likely to meet with a staff person. Staff members are key allies in your advocacy, so don't underestimate the potential of these relationships. Legislative assistants and other staff have a great deal of influence and will relay your message to their bosses.



You can meet at the district office but do not forget about a site visit. Look to Section Four for more details.

A dialogue with your elected representative is one of the most basic rights of our democracy. And while you bring neither meal tickets nor gifts, you nonetheless represent a constituency wielding a most valuable legislative commodity: votes. Remember that they work for you!

If you are going to be in Washington, D.C. and wish to schedule a meeting there, contact the D.C. office of your Senator or Representative about two weeks in advance and ask to speak with the scheduler. Introduce yourself, identify your place of employment, and make sure to point out that you live and/or work in the Congress Member's district. Explain that you are visiting Washington and that you would like to meet with the Member (if possible) or the legislative staff in charge of your issue of interest (e.g., health, housing, etc.). Some offices prefer that you email a meeting request, but the scheduler will let you know about specific office protocol. Follow up a couple days prior to your meeting just to confirm. **Expect your meeting to last only 15 minutes;** this leaves you time to schedule meetings with other representatives.

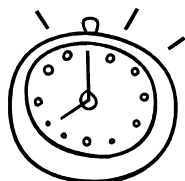


State and Local Level: State and local elected officials generally are far more accessible. Build relationships on the State level by meeting in the Capitol during your legislative session and inviting your representatives for a tour of your project when the legislature is out of session. Contact your state and local offices to set up such a meeting and use the protocol described above (your representatives can be found at www.ncsl.org/?tabid=17173.) Follow a similar process when working with officials at City Hall. City Council members are frequently accessible for more informal conversations at local community meetings.

Save Time Getting Around Capitol Hill



Take the subway, parking is very limited

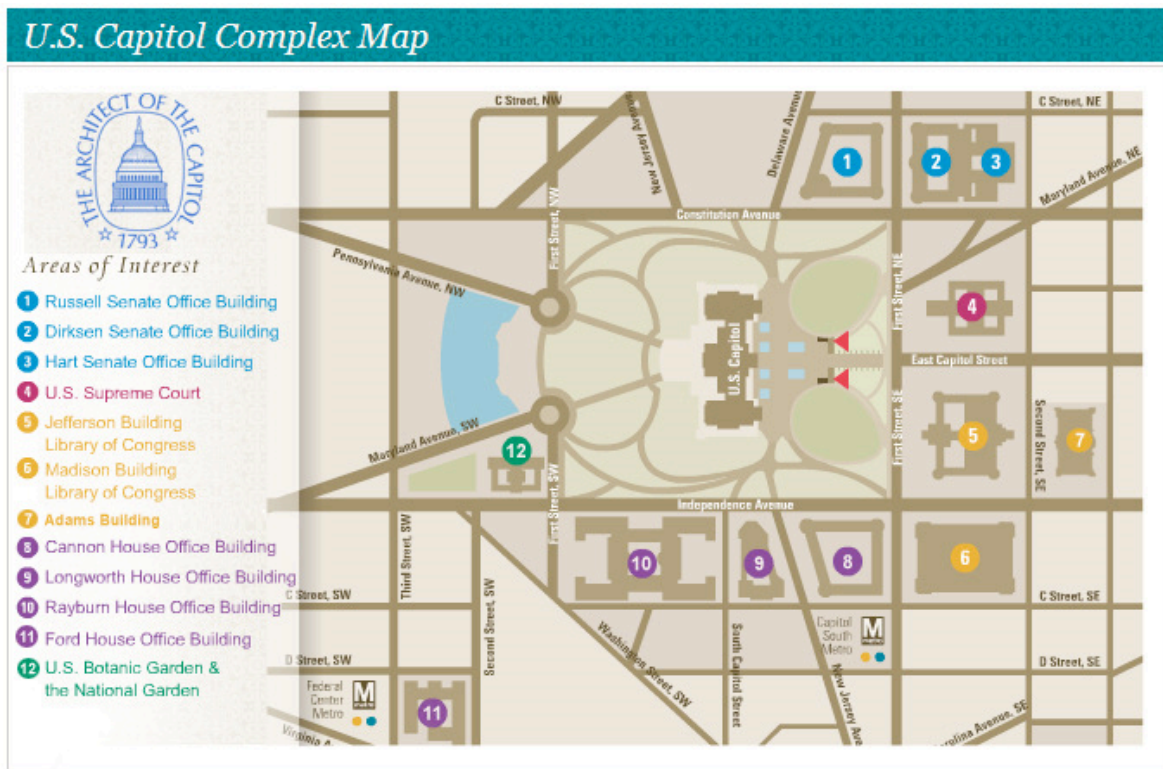


Plan extra time if you are meeting with both House and Senate offices (anticipate a hike from one side of Capitol Hill to the other)



Get lunch in the basement cafeterias

Figure 1. Map of Capitol Hill



A full page map is available at: http://www.aoc.gov/cc/cc_map.cfm

PREPARING

Get the most out of a 15-minute meeting by planning ahead and asking the following questions:

Who should attend with you?

Try to get a small but diverse group of constituents to attend the meeting with you (no more than five). This could include consumers, other staff members, board members, or representatives from other organizations. A broad 'coalition' lends legitimacy to your priority issues. Make sure to let the office know how many people are coming with you so they can plan for space.

What materials will you bring?

Always leave behind some written materials. Information about the work you do, your policy priorities, and information about the specific issue you plan to address help educate policy makers and refresh their memory later when they need the information. Use the National HCH Council website for resources, and add your own. Try to keep the packet small so they are not overwhelmed.



Where you are going?

Be on time even though your legislator may be late. Determine in advance where you are going and give yourself enough time to get there. Factor in enough time to get through security and to walk between the House and Senate office buildings.

What do you want the policy maker to do?

Officials will often expect some sort of request (known as an “ask”). Consider your “ask” and make sure that it is something your elected official has the power and ability to accomplish. Common “asks” include cosponsoring a bill, speaking with their leadership, signing a letter of support, or voting for or against a bill. Anticipate the potential concerns about your “ask” and prepare responses.

How will you frame your message?

There are many ways to say the same thing. Consider the communication style through which your legislator is most likely to hear your message. Do a little advance research on the philosophy and voting record of your legislator. Think about your word choices and how you will describe your issue in a way that appeals to the Member of Congress.

What will you say and who will say it?

Have a pre-meeting with your group to determine the central points to be made and who will address each theme or issue. This will help the meeting go smoothly and ensure all your issues are covered. You only have 15 minutes, so do not over-plan—three to four key points are sufficient, and your “ask” should be very clear. Leave some time for questions and discussion.

During the Meeting

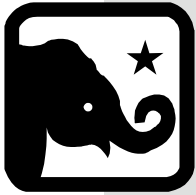
The standard legislative meeting lasts 15 minutes (maybe more on the state and local level) and should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Ensure sufficient time for the middle section of your meeting by keeping the introduction and conclusion brief.

INTRODUCTION

Introduce each person in the group and establish your connection to the Member and his/her district so they know you represent a large constituency. Familiarize your legislator with your organization, its services, and its role in the community. If applicable, thank the representative for any past support.

BODY

Do not linger on introduction and pleasantries for too long. You are at this meeting with a purpose. Allow time for each of the issues you wish to discuss and follow your planned agenda. Members and staff may try to keep the small talk going to avoid discussing issues of disagreement. Never be rude, but gently guide the discussion back to your agenda if it veers off course.



If your official has very different positions from you, appreciate this and acknowledge the difference of opinion. Understand their point of view and their concerns—and prepare responses ahead of time. Keep the conversation calm and respectful at all times.

CONCLUSION

Present your “ask” and request specific commitments from your legislator. This might include sponsoring a new bill, supporting or opposing existing legislation, speaking to leadership or caucus members about an issue, or taking some other action. Allow time for questions. If you do not know an answer, never fabricate one. Tell your legislator that you will follow up with their staff after the meeting.

Your responses during the meeting depend on the feedback you get from the staff or representative. The following suggestions can guide you:

Expresses support

- Determine the strength of their support
- Ask if they will take a leadership role or speak to their colleagues
- Ask if they can recommend others you can seek out for support

States they are unsure

- Determine the nature of their concern(s)
- Offer to provide more information addressing these concerns
- Establish a time to follow up and do not press them further

Expresses opposition

- Determine the strength of their opposition
- Politely address their concerns but do not expect to change their mind in one meeting
- Look for ways to maintain and further the relationship despite disagreement

Does not indicate their position:

- Do not assume you know their position based on party affiliation or other factors
- Attempt to clarify their position and offer to follow up
- Look for opportunities to further the relationship



After the Meeting

Always follow up after your meeting with a letter of thanks. Briefly summarize your issues and provide any additional information or answers to questions discussed during the meeting. The thank you letter is an effective relationship building tool and a great way to demonstrate your appreciation.

Now that you are a pro at legislative meetings, you'll be able to hone your advocacy skills with practice. There are many people in the policy world you can educate about the issues important to you and your clients. Make the most of your expertise by continuing to identify issues, raise awareness about solutions, and involve others in your advocacy. Policy change is just around the corner.

It is important to keep these suggestions in mind but do not make this into something bigger than it is. Keep it simple and remember the 'do's and don'ts' on the following page .

DO

relax

Remember that they work for you and that you have important information they need to do their job.

be polite

Social pleasantries are important. You want them to like you and think favorably about your organization.

be assertive

You have a purpose, so stick to your agenda.

look professional

Appearances matter. Most elected officials expect professional attire. Consumers should wear professional attire if possible, but do not allow attire to prevent their participation.

educate

Do not assume that the official or their staff knows about your issues. Even if your legislator does not support your position, you can still educate them.

tell the truth

Nothing will ruin a relationship with an elected official like providing false information. Do not exaggerate problems, and be honest if you do not know the answer to a question.

follow up

Ensure that you follow up with additional information if it is requested or you have offered it. It is a great way to show you are a resource to the office. Not following up can damage the relationship you've worked to create.

be appreciative

Thank your representatives for anything they have done for you in the past and always thank them for their time regardless of the outcome of the meeting.

have fun

The opportunity to speak to one's elected representatives should not be a burden. It is an opportunity to speak your mind and exercise democratic freedoms. Advocacy can be fun – enjoy yourself!

DON'T

be combative

Regardless of your opinion of a particular representative or their staff, remain polite. Make sure the conversation remains constructive and calm.

burn bridges

Today's opposition might be tomorrow's ally on this or another issue. Always remain respectful because you do not know how this official can help down the road. Education and awareness take time to build.

make comments about integrity

Despite sensational reports of corruption, the vast majority of officials are interested in the public good. Do not make any comment about money in politics and make sure such attitudes do not affect how you interact with the official. Negative comments will be remembered more than any positive points you made.

discuss political campaigns

Staff for elected officials are prohibited from discussing political campaigns. And nonprofits are prohibited from engaging in electoral activity.

be late

The official may be late, but you do not want them waiting for you.

be disorganized

Make sure to have all of your materials prepared. Turn off your phone, do not shuffle through your bag, and don't talk over one another during the meeting.

dismiss talking with an aide

Officials and their staff are very busy. They do not have much time for meetings or policy analysis. Legislative aides have tremendous influence in policy decisions and are very important to policy advocacy.



Next Steps

These strategies should have you well on your way to a successful meeting with your elected official. Good luck in your advocacy efforts and stay tuned for future advokit publications on administrative advocacy and working with the media!