



COLLEGE of AMERICAN PATHOLOGISTS

Tips for Being an Effective Advocate

There are many ways you can connect with your members of Congress.

Remember, you are the expert on your specialty. Most members of Congress know very little about what pathologists do or the issues you face, but elected officials always want to hear from their constituents. You can use these opportunities to educate them about the needs and concerns of pathologists, let them know how a specific issue will affect their districts, share personal or local experiences, and build lasting relationships with your elected officials and their staff.

Schedule a Personal Meeting:

- **Request an appointment.** When you contact the office of a representative or a senator, you'll probably speak to his or her scheduler. Explain who you are and what organization you represent.
 - **Be flexible on the timing.** Remember, legislators are busy people and are always juggling priorities. Be as flexible as possible with your time in order to make the most of theirs.
 - **Explain the purpose of the meeting and how long it will take.** If you need 20 minutes, ask for 20 minutes. If you need 10, ask for 10. Don't ask for more time than you need. Once you start the meeting, stick to your time commitment.
 - **Be willing to meet with staff members.** Remember, your legislator probably has assigned a member of his or her staff to follow the issue and provide a briefing on relevant information.
 - **Show up early.** If your legislator is running ahead of schedule, this may get you more time. If he or she is running late, the knowledge that you have been waiting may make him or her more attentive to your message.
 - **Get to the point.** Again, you are dealing with a very busy person. While exchanging pleasantries is important, get down to business as soon as possible. Make your points and then depart.
 - **Send a follow-up thank you letter.** A follow-up letter will remind your legislator of the substance of the meeting and of any actions either one of you promised.
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Call Your Legislator:

- **If possible, talk directly with your representative.** If the legislator is not available, ask to speak to the Health Legislative Assistant.
- **Always leave a message.** If no one is available to speak to you, leave a voice mail message or ask the receptionist to take your name and number.
- **Get straight to the point.** When you reach your legislator or a staffer, explain who you are and why you are calling. Tell your legislator what he or she needs to hear from you, and make sure to stay on topic. Don't waste your legislator's time or yours.
- **Follow up your conversation with an email.** The email should re-emphasize key points made during the call.



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Attend a Town Hall Meeting:

- **Write out your question ahead of time.** Preparing what you plan to say will help you to be clear and concise in asking your question. Explain why the issue is important to you personally and how it affects you and others like you.
 - **Get there early so that you get a good seat.**
 - **Be respectful when asking your question.** Keep your exchange polite; don't argue with the legislator. Be sure to thank him or her for any positive actions he has taken (cosponsoring legislation, attending a previous meeting or lab tour, etc.).
 - **Have a back-up plan.** You may not get called on to ask your question. Bring an issue brief or one-page summary of the issue that you can leave with the legislator's staff and ask them to follow up with you. Be sure to include your contact information.
 - **Follow up with an email.** If the legislator answers your question, send him a thank you note by email. This will remind the legislator of the substance of your question and may prompt him to action. As an expert in your field, you can also offer to be a resource for the legislator and staff on the issue.
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Write a Letter to the Editor:

- **Find your local paper.** If you don't know how to submit a letter to your local newspaper, you can find that information by [looking up your paper's website](#) by state and then city/town. Most websites will have submission instructions on their contact page.
 - **Know your subject.** If you are responding to an action alert, you may already have a template or sample text provided to you. If not, review the issue briefs and other materials available on cap.org. The CAP Advocacy staff is also happy to provide additional information or guidance.
 - **Make it personal.** Don't just give the talking points. Explain why the issue is important to you personally and how it affects you and others like you.
 - **Keep it brief.** Most newspapers will have a word limit - typically between 200-500 words. The word limit is often included in the submission instructions on the website.
 - **Include your contact information.** If your letter is selected to be published, the editors will use this information to get in touch with you.
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Send a Thank You Note:

- **Thank them for their time.** Whether you met with your legislator or a staff member, remember that they have extremely busy schedules and their time is valuable.
- **Briefly reiterate the issues you discussed.** A thank you note serves as a follow-up to your meeting and a reminder of the conversation you had. It also lets them know that you will be persistent in getting an answer and/or action from your legislator.
- **Continue to build the relationship.** Take advantage of opportunities to stay in touch. Promise to follow up when there is a new development on the issue (legislation introduced, report published, etc.). Invite your member of Congress to visit your laboratory or offer to serve on their health advisory committee.



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- **A handwritten note is preferable** if you met with your member of Congress or Senator personally. If you met with staff, an email is sufficient.

Addressing Correspondence:

To a Senator:

The Honorable (full name)
United States Senate
__(Rm.#) __(name of) Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

To a Representative:

The Honorable (full name)
United States House of Representatives
__(Rm.#) __(name of) House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as:

Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman:
Dear Madam Speaker or Mr. Speaker: