



## **Advocacy Tip Sheet for Face-to-Face Meetings with Congressional Members**

### **Meeting with Senators and Members of the House of Representatives**

You can meet with your legislator in a state or local district office or in the Washington, D.C. office. Proper preparation is essential for ensuring a successful visit.

First, call to set up an appointment to meet the Senator or Representative. You can find the DC and local phone numbers by going to the Member's website (visit [www.senate.gov/senators/contact](http://www.senate.gov/senators/contact) or [www.house.gov/representatives](http://www.house.gov/representatives)).

You can also contact your legislator in the D.C. office by using the Capitol switchboard to place the call. Simply dial 202-224-3121 (Senate) or 202-225-3121 (House) and ask for your legislator's office or provide your zip code.

**First thing to remember: Policy makers won't think you are rude for stating what you want, and may think it odd if you don't. Part of their job is to be asked and part of your job is to ask.**

**Make the Appointment well in advance:** When attempting to meet with a House Member or Senator, contact the Appointment Secretary/Scheduler in the office or ask to speak with the staff member who handles health and/or disability issues. Explain your purpose and who you are representing (Maine used as an example).

- *Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ . May I speak with Senator/Rep. \_\_\_\_\_'s scheduler or the person who handles health and disability issues? (If you already have the name of the local or DC staff contact, just ask for them directly)*
- *I am with the Maine Respite Coalition. The members of the Coalition include numerous statewide organizations, including (name a few of the larger organizations who are members such as UCP, Easter Seals, MS, AARP, etc.)*

- *I am calling to schedule an appointment at a convenient time to meet with Senator/Rep. \_\_\_\_\_ or the appropriate staff member to discuss funding for the Lifespan Respite Care Program and the accelerating need for respite care in Maine.*

***Don't underestimate the importance of staff.***

If you can only get an appointment with a staff member, don't underestimate the importance of the staff or the meeting. Sometimes this type of meeting can be even more important because it is the staff member's job to make sure their boss has all the facts and gets back to you in a timely way.

***Plan your presentation.***

- Be prepared to explain the extent of the need for respite in your state ([number of family caregivers](#), the cost born by your state's caregivers, waiting lists for respite, etc).
- Familiarize yourself with the statistics that describe the need and benefits of respite, the goals of the [Lifespan Respite Care Program](#), and how the Senator/Rep. can help get funding, and be prepared to share the information.
- Bring a list of legislators from your state already supporting Lifespan Respite funding (if there is one).
- **PRACTICE!!** If time is extremely limited, practice making your pitch in two minutes or less, but be prepared to follow-up with more information if time permits.

***Limit your visit to discussing the Lifespan Respite Care Program and related local examples.***

- **Stay focused** and avoid side issues.
  - Remember that what you hope to get out of the meeting is support for increased funding for the Lifespan Respite Care Program, co-sponsorship of the Lifespan Respite Reauthorization Act and/or a commitment to attend an event you have planned.
- If they already support the Lifespan Respite Program and requested funding levels, **thank them for their leadership** and encourage them to contact Congressional Leadership and Appropriations Committee members to fund the bill at the requested amount or contact the lead sponsors of the reauthorization bill to sign on as a cosponsor.
- Summarize and share the **material/data** from the one-page NRC funding request or alert sent to you, from other [NRC legislative alerts](#), or from [information or talking points](#) on the National Respite Coalition website, and any other materials you brought along.

- Share any **personal stories** you may have about your own or your client's needs for respite care.
- Be **courteous and respectful** to staff members as well as the legislator.
- Keep your message **brief**, to the point, and simple.

***Be Polite, but also be Political***

- Members of Congress want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interest of the Member's constituency.
- Let them know how you plan to share the results of this meeting with others (through a mailing or newsletter, at a Lifespan Respite Summit or other event)
- Describe for the member how you or your groups can be of assistance to him/her. (e.g., find respite for other constituents, find more information, etc.)

***Listen to your legislator's responses.***

- Leave time for questions.
- Find out if he or she has heard opposing views. If so, find out what the arguments are and what groups are involved.

***Be Truthful and Accurate. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't make it up.***

- Offer to find out and send information back to the office later.

***Remember to ask for a commitment and be sure to Thank Them.***

- Ask for a letter from the Senator or Representative stating his/her position on the Lifespan Respite Care Program and whether he/she will support funding and reauthorization for the program.
- If the purpose is also to ensure that they attend an event, check for a commitment to attend.

***Follow up your visit with a thank you note.***

- Note should outline the points covered during the meeting.
- Send along any additional information and materials requested.
- Thank them for their time and support.

***Please let me know how the meetings went and the outcomes.***

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