



HELPFUL HINTS...

Meeting with a Member of Congress, or congressional staff, is a very effective way to convey a message about a specific issue or legislative matter (*Congress at Your Fingertips*, Capitol Advantage).

1. **Plan your Visit Carefully:** Be clear about what it is you want to achieve; determine in advance which member or committee staff you need to meet with to achieve your purpose.
2. **Make an Appointment:** When attempting to meet with a member, contact the Appointment Secretary/Scheduler. Explain your purpose and whom you represent. It is easier for congressional staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and your relationship to the area or interests represented by the member.
3. **Be Prompt and Patient:** When it is time to meet with a member, be punctual and be patient. It is not uncommon for a Congressman or Congresswoman to be late, or to have a meeting interrupted due to the member's crowded schedule. If interruptions do occur, be flexible when the opportunity presents itself. Continue your meeting with a member's staff.
4. **Be Prepared:** Whenever possible, bring to the meeting information and materials supporting your position. Members are required to take positions on many different issues. In some instances, a member may lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is therefore helpful to share with the member information and examples that demonstrate clearly the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation.
5. **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 interests of the member's constituency. If possible, describe for the member how you or your group can be of assistance to him/her. When it is appropriate, remember to ask for a commitment.
6. **Be responsive:** Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information in the event the member expresses interest or asks questions. Follow up the meeting with a thank you letter that outlines the different points covered during the meeting, and send along any additional information and materials requested.

When writing a letter to your U. S. Representative or Senators, keep in mind the following rules of thumb:

1. Stick to one subject.
2. Be brief.
3. Be factual.
4. Include the bill number and title (i.e. The Rare Diseases Act, P.L. 107-280, The Rare Diseases Orphan Product Development Act, P.L. 107-281).
5. Get personal. Be courteous. Describe how the legislation impacts you. Include key information, using examples to support your position.
6. **Ask for Action!**
7. When you receive a reply, study the argument and refute logically, if applicable. If your representative or senators happen to agree with your arguments, a thank you note is most appropriate.
8. Your personal letter, written on your personal stationery, will send a strong message: ***I am a constituent. I vote. The issue is very important to my family and me.***

Where do I send my letter? (Note: Keep in mind that it is now taking about 1 month for Congress to receive letters)

Senate	The Honorable _____ United States Senate Washington, DC 20510 Dear Senator _____:	House The Honorable _____ U. S. House or Representatives Washington, DC 20515 Dear Representative: _____:
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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, or Dear Mr. Speaker

Sending e-mails to Congress (<http://www.house.gov/writerep/>)

When addressing an e-mail to a member of Congress, the body of your message should use the following format:

Your name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (Representative or Senator) (last name),

Start your message here.

What do I do if I don't know the name of my representative or senators?

1. Call your local League of Women Voters, or
2. On the internet –
 - a. <http://www.thomas.gov>. The Library of Congress guide to everything you wanted to know about the U. S. Congress.
 - b. <http://www.house.gov/writerep/>
 - c. http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

Other valuable resources

1. Need a phone number? Call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.
2. <http://www.opensecrets.org> – All the information you ever needed to know about political contributions
3. <http://www.vote-smart.org/index.phtml> – Learn how your representative or senators voted on an issue and much, much more.

Three important points to remember

1. Influencing public policy to promote political and/or social change is a civic duty. People with rare disorders have been silent too long.
2. The one constant we all must remember is that legislators have to get re-elected and they pay close attention to the views and opinions of their constituents.
3. ***Remember! NORD does not vote, but you do. The ultimate authority of the U. S. Congress to act resides in individual voters, not in institutions!***