

# Public Policy Guide



## THE AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS: EFFECTIVE CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT



**NATIONAL COUNCIL**  
FOR COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE

*Healthy Minds. Strong Communities.*

# THE AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS: EFFECTIVE CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT



*“Political action is the highest  
responsibility of a citizen.”*

**JOHN F. KENNEDY**  
35TH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

*Fellow Behavioral Healthcare Leader:*

This Public Policy Guide has been prepared expressly for members of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare to assist you in communicating and developing relationships with your elected officials and their staffs.

I challenge each of you to increase and improve your efforts to educate community leaders and lawmakers regarding the importance and value of the services we provide.

Increasing their understanding of what we do and the public benefits that result from our work on behalf of the American people will help these officials make sound decisions on policies that impact us and those we serve.

The National Council is leading the way — and I encourage you to do your part to help bring about an approach to mental health and addictions treatment worthy of America in the 21st century.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Linda Rosenberg". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Linda Rosenberg, MSW, CSW, President & CEO  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare



# THE AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS: EFFECTIVE CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT



*“A nation, as a society, forms a moral person, and every member of it is personally responsible for his society.”*

THOMAS JEFFERSON

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL COUNCIL

The National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) association representing 1,300 mental health and addictions treatment organizations that serve nearly six million people in communities across the U.S.

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# CONGRESSIONAL COMMUNICATIONS: AN OVERVIEW

Over 200 million communications reach the U.S. Congress every year – phone calls, faxes, emails and visits.

A Senator from a large state like California, New York or Texas represents as many as 37 million people and an economy bigger and more complex than all but a handful of the world's largest nations.

They may have several dozen staff members in numerous locations as well as a vast network of informal advisors, friends, lobbyists, as well as Congressional research organizations, trade associations, think tanks and others they depend on to stay informed of key issues.

*How can your communications – your phone calls, faxes, emails and visits – have an impact within this vast sea of communications and participants helping shape an elected official's thinking on an issue?*



## DO YOUR HOMEWORK

### KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Before communicating with or visiting with your elected officials or their staffs you should know as much as possible about who you are visiting.

Checking the legislators Congressional and campaign websites will provide a broad array of important information about the official, their state or district, election history, committee, subcommittee and leadership assignments and issue interests. Many officials send out emails to their constituents who wish to stay informed of their activities.

Knowing whether an official is a long-time supporter of mental health issues, a strong fiscal and social conservative or interested in senior citizen or veterans issues, for example, will help you determine how best to present the issues you will discuss.

Be sure to know the names of key staff people in the office – chief of staff, legislative director, legislative assistant for health care, scheduler – so that you know who to communicate with and how to contact them.

### KNOW YOUR ISSUES

Know the arguments for — and against — the issues you want to discuss. Read appropriate background information on any issue you will be talking about and be able to answer questions or know how to get the answers to any questions that are raised.

### PREPARE

The “how to’s” of conducting a meeting with an elected official or their staff, finding information on an issue, helping an elected official of your choosing with their campaign and other topics are contained here.

Keep this Public Policy Guide for future reference and as a resource to sharpen your skills as your relationship and level of involvement grows.

*And don't underestimate the impact that you can have if you approach communication and developing meaningful relationships with your elected officials and their staffs in a thoughtful and ongoing manner.*



# THE IMPORTANCE OF CONGRESSIONAL STAFF



Each US Senator has perhaps 2-3 dozen staff members, while each Representative has 12-15. Additionally, both House and Senate committees have professional staff that assist elected officials in the deliberations of those committees.

The staff of a Senator or Representative or committee is of tremendous importance in the legislative process. They advise members and do much of the hands-on work.

Key staff you will need to get to know include the Senator or Congressman's:

- 🌸 **Chief of Staff**
- 🌸 **Legislative Director**
- 🌸 **Legislative Assistant** (responsible for health care, mental health, criminal justice, appropriations or other areas depending on the issue)
- 🌸 **Scheduler** (for scheduling meetings with the Senator or Congressman)
- 🌸 **State or District Director**
- 🌸 **Press Secretary** (if you're working on media activity involving your Senator or Congressman)

Sometimes it's useful to be in contact with the Senator or Congressman's campaign staff or appropriate Committee or Subcommittee staff as well as the official's personal staff.

That's how a successful professional lobbyist manages their relationship with a Senate or House member and their staff.

To have maximum impact with your Senator or Congressman, you will need to do the same.

## BUILDING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

**1** The best time to get to know your legislator is back home when they are less distracted by the business of the Congress. You should make every effort to visit your Senator or Representative to get to know them better and educate them when they are home during a Congressional break, typically in the spring, summer and near the holidays. Take advantage of any opportunity to meet and get acquainted with your elected official. Attend an in-district meeting open to the public and introduce yourself. Attend a campaign fundraiser. Visit them in their district office to introduce – or reintroduce – yourself.

**2** Increasing your degree of influence with your Senator and Representative is easier than you think. Get to know them personally. Invite them to your offices. As a citizen, support campaigns of your choosing to show them that you respect their service and care about them too. Provide them with information in a way that is clear and useful to them.

REMEMBER,  
STAY IN  
TOUCH...



ESPECIALLY  
WHEN YOU'RE NOT  
ASKING THEM TO  
DO SOMETHING  
FOR YOU.



# MEETING WITH YOUR CONGRESSMAN AND SENATORS

There is no substitute for the opportunity to communicate face-to-face with your legislators.

They get to hear your story, unfiltered and direct from you, and gain a sense of your dedication to issues important to you and others within your organization.



## When you're ready to set up a meeting with your Congressman or Senator, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- ☀ Meet only with your own elected representatives or those whose constituents you serve as consumers.
- ☀ Bring another spokesperson with you — a Trustee, local elected official, law enforcement representative, or other community leader — and let the legislator's office know who will be coming with you and why.
- ☀ Call in as far in advance as possible to schedule.
- ☀ Show up ten minutes early. Never be late. And be understanding if your legislator is late.
- ☀ Always address your legislator as “Senator” or “Representative” – even if you know them.
- ☀ Focus on **one issue per meeting** and assume you will have ten minutes to make your case.
- ☀ Don't hesitate to meet with the staff if the elected official is unavailable.
- ☀ Tell them a little about yourself and your organization.
- ☀ Leave them brief information on your organization and issues you are discussing.

- ☀ Suggest a future visit to your facilities so they can see firsthand what you are all about.
- ☀ NEVER give campaign contributions in their office – it's illegal. (Donating to a legislative campaign as a private citizen is perfectly acceptable at a fundraiser or other location or simply by mailing to their campaign office.)



- ☀ Thank them for their time – and ask what you can do for them.
- ☀ Always send a brief thank you letter within a day or two of your meeting.



# FACTS ELECTED OFFICIALS WILL WANT TO KNOW ABOUT YOU & YOUR ORGANIZATION

Most Senators, Congressmen and their staff members know little about community behavioral healthcare or addictions — and they are interested in you personally as well.



Here are some important facts they will want to know:

- ☀ Where you live in their district and how long you have resided there.
- ☀ Where your organization's programs are located.
- ☀ How your organization is locally governed and how it meets local needs.
- ☀ Board members they will know.
- ☀ How many people your organization employs and the size of its payroll.
- ☀ How many consumers your organization serves.
- ☀ How your track record contributes to stronger and safer communities.

- ☀ Why federal and state dollars spent on your services and community-based behavioral healthcare are a good investment of taxpayer dollars



- ☀ What you need to do an even better job.



# COORDINATING VISITS TO YOUR FACILITY



When the Congress is not in session, every Senator & Representative should be afforded the opportunity to see community behavioral healthcare and addictions treatment up close and personal.

Here are some suggestions for approaching this important activity:

- ☀ Invite your legislator in person, by letter, telephone or email either directly or through staff depending on how well you know the legislator.
- ☀ Plan your time with your legislator at your organization carefully as they are often on a tight schedule.
- ☀ Brief employees to be involved in advance and stay on schedule.
- ☀ Find out who will be accompanying your Congressman on the visit.
- ☀ Have a photographer take pictures for use in the legislator's newsletter or website and make them available to the local press.

- ☀ Ask if you can assist the legislator's office in writing a press release to the local media to send with photos – or issue one from your organization – if your Congressman wishes.



- ☀ Follow-up with a thank you letter to your Congressman after their visit.



# ONGOING COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR CONGRESSMAN



**M**eeting with your elected officials is important. But you must keep the dialogue going by updating them on issues important to you, whether it is by mail, phone or email. Legislators need to know how things are progressing and why to make sound decisions on your behalf. Plus, it affords them the opportunity to ask you for help that they may need to advocate for your positions.

**S**ending a well thought out letter on your own stationery, placing a call, or sending a fax or email is critical to keeping the discussion alive and communication channels open. Calls, faxes and emails are particularly effective when time is short, the legislative session is drawing to a close and when it's important to deliver critical information right away.

**Important information about sending letters to your Federal officials:** After the attacks of 9/11/2001 and subsequent anthrax attacks on the US Senate, ALL mail entering the Capitol complex is screened by the US Postal Service. This can result in delays of many days, sometimes weeks, for your correspondence to arrive.

For this reason, all letters to U.S. Senators and Representatives should be sent by fax or email.

# WRITING YOUR SENATORS & CONGRESSMAN

Writing to your elected officials to express your views on legislative proposals impacting your organization and community behavioral health system is important.

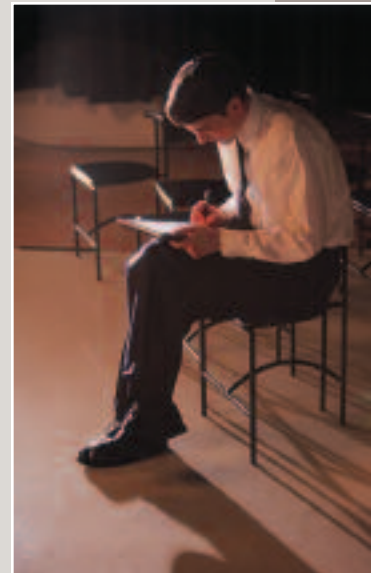
- ✿ Write only when it is important to do so.
- ✿ Use personal stationery showing your home address. That's where you vote – and that's why your legislator cares about what you have to say. Organization stationery is for “official” communications on behalf of your employing organization.
- ✿ As a constituent and a citizen, you should write only to your own legislators and those whose constituents are served by your organization. Remember to address your legislator properly:

The Honorable John Doe  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
Dear Senator Doe:

The Honorable Jane Doe  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
Dear Representative Doe:

- ✿ Tell your legislator specifically what you would like them to do in your opening sentence (e.g. support House Bill 1234, contact Chairman Jones and ask him to agree to XYZ).

- ✿ Support your request with two or three sentences of relevant facts, avoiding jargon and acronyms that they may not understand.
- ✿ Remind your legislator how many people in their district will be affected by the proposal under consideration.
- ✿ Remind your legislator of your expertise on the issue (*years of experience in the field, with your current employer, and other professional or community involvement*).
- ✿ Politely request a commitment for their support.
- ✿ Always fax a copy of your letter to your legislator as well as mail it and make sure it gets into the hands of the appropriate staff person by calling them to let them know it's there.
- ✿ If you don't receive a written reply or telephone response to your letter – write again and enclose your original letter.
- ✿ If you receive a response with which you disagree, write your legislator again and politely tell them so and offer to do whatever you can to help them gain a better understanding of issues.



# ONGOING COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR CONGRESSMAN

**TELEPHONE** calls to legislators and staff are extremely important — especially when a bill is nearing consideration in a subcommittee or committee or on the floor.

Call your legislators & those served by your organization only.

**A**ll Senators and Representatives — and staff — can be reached through the US Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121.



# CALLING & EMAILING YOUR CONGRESSMAN

**EMAIL** communication with your Senators and Congressman and their staff is another way to get your message across quickly and effectively.

All legislators and staff have email addresses that you can usually obtain by calling their offices and sometimes through their websites.

The Senate and House use similar formats.

For US Senate members or staff use:

Example:

firstname\_lastname@(senator's lastname).senate.gov  
*(For example, if you wanted to email Joe Smith in Senator Jones' office you would address to Joe\_Smith@jones.senate.gov)*

For US House of Representatives members or staff, the format is:

Example:

firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov  
*(For example, if you wanted to email Mary Jones in Representative Brown's office you would address to Mary.Jones@mail.house.gov)*

THE SAME RULES &  
COMMENTS THAT  
APPLY TO LETTERS  
ON PAGE 17  
APPLY TO EMAIL  
COMMUNICATIONS.



# STRENGTHENING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS



**B**uilding a professional relationship with your legislators is the key to success. That means it is just as important for the legislator to get value from the relationship as it is for you. Show your legislator the respect and support that they deserve for representing your interests.

Here are some suggestions to help build a good relationship with your elected representatives:

- ☀ Help generate positive media attention when legislators visit your organization by working with them and their staff to develop and submit a press release with photos.
- ☀ Help legislators when their constituents have an behavioral health related issue by being available to answer any questions they or their staff might have.
- ☀ Contribute personally to the election campaigns of elected officials of your choosing and attend campaign fundraisers — just remember not to contribute in their government offices. If you wish to personally host a fundraiser, work with the legislator's campaign staff — not their Senate or House staff — to confirm a date and location, invitation list, and other details.

- ☀ Volunteer to work on the campaign by putting up yard signs, walking your block with campaign literature, making fundraising calls, bringing lunch to campaign staff, and in other ways.
- ☀ Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper mentioning your legislator when he or she supports or otherwise advances your issues in the Congress.

If your elected representatives know you as a voter, constituent, friend and supporter, they are likely to be more responsive to you than to those who have not developed that relationship and who write or call only when they are in need.



# GETTING OTHERS INVOLVED

Other community groups and leaders can also be motivated to communicate with legislators on community mental health and addictions treatment if properly informed and supported.



Some who might be willing to help include supportive state legislators, mayors, other local officials, consumer and advocacy groups, law enforcement, clergy, business, physicians, mental health and other professionals who can attest to the value of your organization.

By sharing issue information with other interested constituents and encouraging them to write, fax and call legislators when the need arises, you can develop a group of informed and active advocates for behavioral health and addictions issues and leverage the strength of others as part of your efforts.

THE MORE PEOPLE WHO CONTACT THEIR LEGISLATORS IN SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SYSTEM...

THE BETTER OUR PROSPECTS FOR LEGISLATIVE SUCCESS.



# NAVIGATING THE SESSION

The months of building a relationship with your elected officials will ultimately pay dividends as the Congress proceeds through session.

It's essential that those responsible for communicating the benefits and needs of your organization be informed, focused & ready to communicate with elected officials in a timely and effective manner.



Once you've laid the groundwork, your Senator or Congressmen will know who you are and have a basic understanding of your organization's value to the community.

The pace of a Congress is frantic, and becomes more so as the session nears its conclusion. Appropriations and other key issues will be addressed informally as well as through the committee hearings process.

It's always good to check in with your Senators and Congressman and their key staff early in the session to lay out major issues and policy positions. It's best to do this in person.

As the Congress progresses, there will be ongoing communication efforts with legislators and other government officials conducted by the National Council public policy team.

Information will be provided on a regular basis to key contacts involved in those efforts and may always be obtained by calling the National Council at (301) 984-6200 or going to [www.nccbh.org](http://www.nccbh.org).



# A NOTE ON CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES



Much of the heaviest lifting in Congress is done through the committee system.

Congress divides its tasks among approximately 250 committees and subcommittees to manage the heavy volume and complexity of legislation. The House and Senate each have their own, very similar, committee systems.

Standing committees generally have legislative jurisdiction over a defined set of issues. Subcommittees handle specific areas of the standing committee's work.

Several thousand bills and resolutions are referred to committees during each 2-year Congress. Committees typically select only a small percentage for consideration, and those not addressed often receive no further action.

When a committee or subcommittee favors a measure, it usually takes four actions.

- ❁ First it asks relevant executive agencies for written comments on the measure.
- ❁ Second, it holds hearings to gather information and views from non-committee experts. At committee hearings, these witnesses summarize submitted statements and then respond to questions.
- ❁ Third, a committee meets to perfect the measure through amendments, and non-committee members sometimes attempt to influence the language.
- ❁ Fourth, when language is agreed upon, the committee sends the measure back to the full Senate or House, usually along with a written report describing its purposes and provisions.

As a leader on behavioral health issues, you are a valuable resource for your elected officials. This could result in a legislator requesting you to provide information that he or she can take before legislative committees and other government bodies.



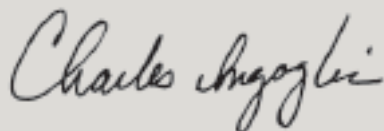
# A FINAL NOTE: PROVIDING FEEDBACK TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL

As you develop your relationships with your legislators and their staff, you will learn valuable information that can be put to good use on behalf of our common agenda by the National Council staff and public policy team.



Providing feedback on the results of your visits, letters, email and telephone conversations with legislators and their staffs is of tremendous value in planning strategy, counting votes and other activities supporting our legislative objectives.

Remember to contact National Council staff to pass along information resulting from your legislative contact efforts.



Charles “Chuck” Ingoglia  
Vice President, Public Policy  
National Council for

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301.881.7159 fax  
[www.nccbh.org](http://www.nccbh.org)



# SOURCES OF INFORMATION



There's a wealth of information on politics, public policy and mental health and addictions issues.

C-SPAN allows you to watch Senate and House hearings and other proceedings live or on a delayed basis. National newspapers including *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and others do a good job covering national affairs as do broadcast and cable news media and pundits.

WEBSITES THAT CAN BE HELPFUL INCLUDE:

## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

(House jurisdiction over Federal spending)

<http://appropriations.house.gov>

## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

(House jurisdiction on taxes, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and some other

entitlements): <http://waysandmeans.house.gov>

## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & COMMERCE

(House jurisdiction over health and healthcare delivery facilities): <http://energycommerce.house.gov>

## ENERGY AND COMMERCE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

(House jurisdiction over mental health and research; biomedical programs and health protection in general, including Medicaid; and drugs: <http://energycommerce.house.gov/Subcommittees/health.shtml>

## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES:

(House jurisdiction over health insurance matters): <http://financialservices.house.gov>

## SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

(Senate jurisdiction over Federal spending): <http://appropriations.senate.gov/>

## SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

(Senate jurisdiction on taxes, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and some other entitlements): <http://finance.senate.gov/>

## CENTERS FOR MEDICARE AND MEDICAID SERVICES

(administers Medicare, Medicaid, and the State Children's Health Insurance Program):

<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/>

## SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH EDUCATION LABOR AND PENSIONS

(Senate jurisdiction over most of the agencies, institutes, and programs of the Department of Health and Human Services):

<http://help.senate.gov>

## SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION

(Senate jurisdiction over insurance matters):

<http://commerce.senate.gov>

## THOMAS

(Online portal to search Federal legislation): [www.thomas.gov](http://www.thomas.gov)

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

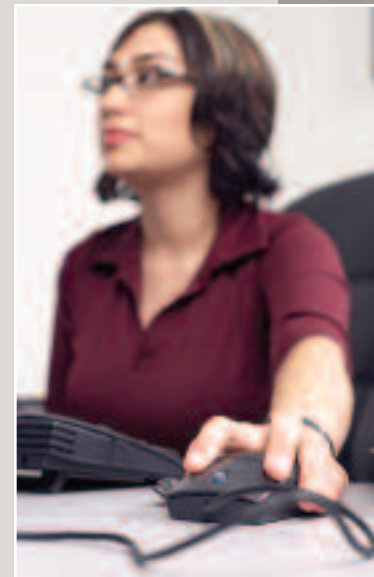
(oversees all Health and Human Services agencies, administers Medicaid,

Medicare and Children's Health Insurance Programs, and investigates Medicaid waste, fraud and abuse):

<http://www.hhs.gov>

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

(administers Federal substance abuse and mental health programs): <http://www.samhsa.gov>



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FOR COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE

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