

TELE-ADVOCATING: HOW TO FOLLOW UP FROM THE FIELD

(Re)Introducing yourself and your programs as valued constituents and resources to your Congressional delegations must be ongoing. Touching base early in a new Congress emphasizes your roles as an advocate, provider, and employer, personalizes the messages, and helps us strengthen children's behavioral health as a priority in public policy.

NACBH has identified a number of legislative proposals and overarching principles for your outreach to Capitol Hill after the 2021 Public Policy (Virtual) Conference. [*NACBH Talking Points: A Better Approach to Children's Behavioral Health* in the conference Reading Room.] We will return to the Hill in person in 2022. In the meantime, please take advantage of the August Congressional recess to reach out to key staff in your Members' offices, and plan to periodically weigh in with them on evolving legislation over the next year.

After the Conference

- ❖ Identify your Senators and Representative(s) by zip code under "Contact Your Member" at <https://www.congress.gov>. Enter the zip code (with 4-digit extension) of your main agency location, and then repeat for additional program locations in case they are in different Congressional districts. You may want to communicate with all of them, or you can prioritize the Members who serve on committees with jurisdiction over key policy issues. It is likely that you serve children from across the state, so feel free to "stretch" your constituency to neighboring districts whose Representative is on a key committee.
- ❖ Clicking on the Member's name will take you to their official website which identifies their committee assignments. [*Key Congressional Committees and Caucuses*, below.]
- ❖ Identify the Member's staff lead on health issues on the *Directory of Congressional Health Staffers* in the Reading Room. This is the person you will email your correspondence to, attaching a letter on your organization's letterhead. The cover email should thank the staff member for sharing your concerns with the Senator/Representative, invite a reply including any questions they may have, and provide your full contact information. The letter itself should be addressed to:

The Honorable (insert Senator's name)
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable (insert Representative's name)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

- ❖ In the subject line of the cover email, insert: Constituent Organization re: [bill number(s) or issue].
- ❖ Be succinct: Include a short tag line of what your agency does, and a brief description of why you are writing, e.g., to ask for their support for critical improvements to the children’s mental health system as highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, or something more specific to your state or community. Then choose one or two of the bills outlined in NACBH’s talking points and write a few sentences about how the bill(s) would improve access, quality, or outcomes for the children and families you serve. Include information about how the bill would affect the state or the Congressional district.
- ❖ Notes: If you are writing to a House member, there is no need to ask for their support for the bills already passed by the House in May [see the *NACBH Talking Points*]. If the Member sponsored or has already signed on to cosponsor a bill, there is no need to ask for their support. In that case, thank them and take the opportunity to mention additional needed legislation. Check the status by entering the bill number at <https://www.congress.gov>.
- ❖ If there are more than a couple of bills that you’d like to advocate for, divide them into “buckets” such as suicide prevention, school-based services, child welfare, etc., and write more than one letter. Alternatively, advocate for different pieces of legislation with different legislators, depending on their committee assignments, caucus membership, and past record.
- ❖ Thank the Member for their service on a key committee or caucus, their past support for important legislation, helpful public statements they have made, etc. A few minutes scrolling through press releases on their website is time well spent if you’re not already familiar with their record.
- ❖ Close by offering to be a resource on these or other issues. If you wish, refer them to NACBH Public Policy Director pat.johnston@nacbh.org as well.

Over the Next Year

- ❖ Sign up on your Members’ websites to receive news releases so that you can track their activity.
- ❖ Send a quick thank you email to the health staff lead for a bill the Member introduced, a vote, or public statement.
- ❖ Follow up every meeting, phone call or emailed response with a thank you.
- ❖ Make a habit of sending invitations for public events at your agency and, if possible, invite them to give brief remarks. Invitations should be sent to the closest district office which will be managing their calendar when they’re back in the state or district.
- ❖ Use responses to invitations to establish a relationship with the district office and request a meeting with staff, at their place or yours.
- ❖ Attend your Members’ town meetings, introduce yourself, offer to be a resource, and provide materials about your organization.

Key Committees and Caucuses

After introduction, bills are referred to the committee or committees that have jurisdiction over their content. You can refer to <https://www.congress.gov> (enter bill status) to confirm a bill's status. In general:

Medicaid

[Senate Finance](#) (communicate with all committee members)
House Energy & Commerce, [Subcommittee on Health](#)

Health (other than Medicaid)

[Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions \(HELP\)](#) (communicate with all committee members)
House Energy & Commerce, [Subcommittee on Health](#)

Child Welfare

[Senate Finance](#) (communicate with all committee members)
House Ways & Means, [Subcommittee on Worker and Family Support](#)

Education

[Senate HELP](#) (communicate with all committee members)
House Education and Labor, [Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education](#)

Military Families

Senate Armed Services, [Subcommittee on Personnel](#)
House Armed Services, [Subcommittee on Military Personnel](#)

Workforce Education and Training

[Senate HELP](#) (communicate with all committee members)
House Education and Labor, [Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment](#)

Caucuses

[Congressional Mental Health Caucus](#) (House)
[Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth](#) (House)
[Senate Foster Care Caucus](#)