



Promoting the health of women and newborns.

LEADERSHIP HANDBOOK



Table of Content

Getting Started	5
Take Action	10
Guide to State Advocacy	12
Legislative Resources	14
Email List	15
Example Action Alert	19
Example Action Alert Letter	20
Example Written Letter	22
Leave Behind Packet	23
Scenario	24



AWHONN is the leading **Advocate** for Health care, ...

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Role of Legislative Coordinator

Thank you for agreeing to serve as an AWHONN Legislative Coordinator! You are vital to ensuring the success of AWHONN's legislative priorities.

The role of the Legislative Coordinator is to inform the section of legislative activities and to keep members excited about advocating for women, infants, and the nursing profession. The majority of the work will focus on participation at the federal level, but many Legislative Coordinators also participate in state activities.

We don't expect you to do this alone! AWHONN's Public Affairs Department is here to provide guidance, as well as keep you updated about AWHONN's Congressional activities. This Handbook will provide helpful advocacy basics, a brief summary of the United States government, and ideas on how to increase participation in grassroots advocacy.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us via email at legislation@awhonn.org or via phone (202) 261-2400 and ask to speak to Public Affairs.



While you don't need to be an expert in policy and procedure, there is information that will make your job as a Legislative Coordinator easier. Included in this section are key terms, an overview of the United States government, and basic "How To"s to get you started on the path to successful grassroots advocacy.

Key Terms

While you do not need to be an expert in public policy or government affairs, there are some important concepts that are helpful to know.

Timing: The length of a Congress is two years. Members of the 111th Congress – some of them newly elected – will be sworn in January 2009. Why is this important? If a bill is introduced during one Congress, but is not signed into law in that same Congress, it is "dead." If a bill "dies" it needs to be reintroduced in the next session.

Committees: The majority of the work done by both the House of Representatives and the Senate is done at the committee level. Each committee has a Chair (from the majority party) and a Ranking Member (from the minority party). Often committees have subcommittees dedicated to specific topics. The committees AWHONN issues generally fall under are the House and Senate Appropriations Committees; House and Senate Budget Committees; the House Energy and Commerce Committee; and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP).

Appropriations: Appropriations bills are the spending bills which fund the programs Congress authorizes or creates. There are 13 appropriations bills which must be completed annually. The federal government plans about a year in advance. For example in 2008, Congress begins work on Fiscal Year (FY) 2009's spending bills. For a complete explanation, **see the Budget Process.**

Basic Structure of the Federal Government

The United States federal government is divided into three branches: executive, judicial, and legislative.

The Executive Branch: The President presides over the executive branch. It also consists of the vice president, the Cabinet and various advisory departments and agencies. For our purposes, the principal duties of the executive branch are to recommend legislation, administer laws, and sign or veto legislation passed by Congress.



The Judicial Branch: The judicial branch oversees the court system and is led by the Supreme Court. The main functions of the courts are to interpret laws. The Supreme Court has ultimate jurisdiction and determines if laws comply with the Constitution.

The Legislative Branch: The legislative branch is the Congress, which is made up of the [House of Representatives](#) and the [Senate](#). The primary purpose of Congress is to make laws.

AWHONN's primarily focuses on legislative activities. Here is an in-depth look at the legislative branch.

Congressional Structure:

The House of Representatives is made up of 435 members. Each U.S. citizen living in one of the 50 states has one Representative. The House of Representatives has its own leadership structure made up of:

Speaker of the House: the Representative for their district, leader of the party, and the leader of the House as a whole.

Majority/Minority Leaders: Both are expected to consult with members to gauge attitudes on the issues of the day, urge party colleagues to support or defeat a particular piece of legislation and communicate the party's overarching policy messages to the media and public. In addition to this, the Majority Leader's duties include the scheduling of legislation for floor consideration and the planning of legislative agendas.

Majority/Minority Whip: The Whips are responsible for assisting the leaders, ensuring member attendance, and counting votes.

[View the current House Leadership](#)

The Senate is made up of 100 members; each state is represented by two Senators. In other words, each U.S. citizen living in one of the 50 states has two Senators. In the case of a tie, the Vice President can cast a vote. The leadership roles in the Senate are similar to those in the House.

Majority/Minority Leaders: Both are expected to consult with members to gauge attitudes on the issues of the day, urge party colleagues to support or defeat a particular piece of legislation and communicate the party's overarching policy messages to the media and public. In addition to this, the Majority Leader's duties include the scheduling of legislation for floor consideration and the planning of legislative agendas.

Majority/Minority Whip: The Whips are responsible for assisting the leaders, ensuring member attendance, and counting votes.

[View the current Senate Leadership](#)

Types of Legislation: There are four main types of legislation.

- **Bill** - The bill is the most common type of legislation. A bill introduced in the House is designated as "H.R. #." When introduced in the Senate, it is designated as "S. #." Every bill is assigned a number according to the order in which it is introduced. This number follows its designation. To become law, a bill requires approval of both chambers of Congress and the president.
- **Joint Resolution** - There is no practical difference between a bill and a joint resolution but that it is designated with "HJ Res #" in the House and "SJ Res #" in the Senate. It resembles a bill by requiring the approval of both houses of Congress and a presidential signature to become law, but generally is used to deal with limited matters, such as a single appropriation.
- **Concurrent Resolution** - This type of legislation relates to matters of the operation of both houses of Congress. It does not become a law, as it does not require a presidential signature.
- **Simple Resolution** - This type of legislation relates to the workings of only one house of Congress. It may be used to express that chamber's opinion on a certain issue and therefore does not require approval by the other chamber, and is not law.

How a Bill Becomes a Law:



At the federal level, a bill can only be introduced by a Representative or a Senator. Once a bill is introduced, it is referred to the committee of jurisdiction. Most committees have multiple subcommittees that specialize in specific issues, such as health care or education. Sometimes hearings are held to gather more information. Should the subcommittee or committee vote to approve a bill, it has several different paths.

In the House, the Rules Committee sets the stage for floor action for every piece of legislation, including the length of debate and the number of amendments that can be offered. Additionally, in both Chambers, the leadership must schedule a vote before there is floor consideration.

In the Senate, there is no Rules Committee. However, in order for a bill to move forward, and avoid a filibuster, which delays a bill, the Senate must achieve cloture which requires 60 votes.

A bill must be passed in both chambers before it can move forward in the process. If the language is not identical in the House and Senate versions, then it needs to be reconciled in a conference committee. If this process is successful, the conference report is sent back to each chamber for consideration. If the House and Senate both approve the ironed out version of the bill, it goes to the president for signature or to be vetoed.

At any point in this process the bill can be rejected or simply ignored, making the process for passage extremely difficult.

The Budget Process: The budget process consists of four basic components: preparation, authorization, appropriation and audit.

- **President's Budget** - Every year, in early February, the President's budget is presented to Congress. While this budget does not carry the weight of law – it is simply the President's recommendation to Congress – it does have the power to rearrange budgetary priorities and to modify departmental estimates.
- **Budget Resolution** - Congress develops a broad frame work for spending in its Budget Resolution (BR) each year. The BR sets overall government spending limits, as well as spending totals for specific categories (i.e. public health, defense, education, etc.). The BR does not have the force of law.
- **Authorization** - In order for a program to be funded, it must first be authorized. Authorization is the process in which a program is designed or modified. Authorizations generally specify who will govern the funds, and when and how programs will be implemented.
- **Appropriations** - Appropriations is the legislative action authorizing the expenditure of public funds. This process determines the precise amount of money the agency or program will receive. Congress is expected to complete the appropriation process before October 1 (the beginning of the fiscal year) every year. If Congress fails to enact appropriation bills for an agency or program, it may pass a temporary funding resolution (a Continuing Resolution) to keep the government operating until Congress can decide how much money should be spent.
- **Audits** - Periodically, audits are conducted as a form of quality control to ensure that funding is distributed and spent according to the authorization and appropriation guidelines.

While most government expenditures proceed through the authorization/appropriation process, entitlement spending does not. The major entitlements are Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, unemployment insurance, and military and federal retirement benefits.

“How To”

Subscribe to the Legislative Action Center: [Click here!](#)

Find your legislator: To find your Federal legislators, visit [AWHONN's Legislative Action Center](#) and type in your zip code. To find all your elected officials, visit [Project Vote Smart](#) and enter in your zip code under the Find Your Representatives box.

Find legislators' votes: To find out how your Federal legislators vote each week, you can subscribe to [MegaVote](#), provided through the AWHONN Legislative Action Center.

Find bills AWHONN supports: To find out which bills AWHONN currently supports, please visit the [Issues and Legislation](#) section of the AWHONN Legislative Action Center.

As an AWHONN Legislative Coordinator, there are many ways you can encourage your section to get involved.

A great first step is getting people excited about public policy. AWHONN Public Affairs staff circulates a quarterly newsletter, [Legislative News and Views](#), which provides updates on Federal affairs. You can receive this newsletter by [signing up for the AWHONN Legislative Action Center](#). Make sure to keep in regular communication with your section by sending them important articles or creating your own newsletter.

Writing Your Legislators

Writing your legislator is an easy and effective way to convey your opinion.

- *Legislative Action Center:* AWHONN's [Legislative Action Center](#) is the MOST important tool you will use as Legislative Coordinator. Public Affairs staff sends email [legislative alerts](#) via the Legislative Action Center to all subscribed members. These alerts in turn, allow you to take action, by sending a **prewritten letter** to your Member of Congress with a few simple clicks. As a Legislative Coordinator, you **must** be [subscribed](#) to the Legislative Action Center.
- When an alert comes through it is helpful to notify your section as quickly as possible. Many alerts are time sensitive so letters must be sent quickly. In addition, there may be some alerts which only target certain Members of Congress. If you or any fellow section members have questions about this, please contact AWHONN Public Affairs staff at legislation@awhonn.org.
- One other note, you do NOT have to be a member of AWHONN to sign up for the Legislative Action Center, so encourage your colleagues, family members, and friends to sign up as well. The section with the largest percentage growth in Legislative Action Center subscribers over one year, will receive the All Star Advocacy Award at AWHONN's annual Convention.
- *Public Affairs Pre- Written Letters:* Occasionally, AWHONN Public Affairs staff will email you pre-written letters. When this happens, instructions on action will be in the body of the email and the prewritten letter will be attached. It is extremely important to copy Public Affairs when you email the letter to the Congressional office. In addition, we ask that you please forward these emails, as appropriate, to your **email tree**. These letters are also time sensitive, so please be sure to take action as quickly as possible.

On your own:

- When writing, stick to one page or less and if possible FAX or email the letter. You can find your legislator's contact information, via the [Congressional Directory](#).
- All mail that goes to a Member of Congress is irradiated to avoid issues associated with anthrax, so getting a letter to the Hill via snail mail is a slow process. Many legislators also have a web form on their website so you can electronically send a letter.
- The "ask" - Each letter should include a request, or "ask" of the legislator. What you are asking the legislator to take action on should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter. For example, "I am writing to ask you to support increased funding for Title VIII programs."
- If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly, e.g., House bill: H. R. _____, Senate bill: S. _____.
- Be courteous, to the point, and include key information, using examples to support your position.
- Address only one policy issue in each letter.
- Include your full name and address.

- Keep in mind that letters are relatively formal, so properly addressing the legislator is important. For more details, please **see example**. Specific room numbers and office names can be found on each legislator's website.

Calling Your Legislator

Calling is another great way to communicate with your legislator and his or her staff, especially when the issue is urgent.

Legislative Action Center: Similar to the letter writing alerts, sometimes the Public Affairs staff will send phone call alerts. These alerts contain talking points about the issue at hand and will direct you how to call your legislator(s).

On your own: If you would like to call your Member to address a particular topic, follow the following steps for a successful call.

- First, to find your Members' phone numbers, look on the Senate or House websites, or call the Capitol Switchboard at: (202) 224-3121. Ask to be connected to your legislator's office.
- Once connected, identify yourself as a constituent and say you would like to speak with the Legislative Assistant who handles the issue you are calling about. In Congressional offices, staff is broken up by categories, such as Health, Transportation, Education, etc.
- When you speak to the Health Legislative Assistant, again identify yourself as a constituent and use your "ask". Keep it brief as staffers have very limited time.

Visiting your Legislators

Perhaps the best way to inform any elected official is to make a visit. You can visit with your Members of Congress in Washington, DC or at home in the district. To get started:

- **Make an Appointment.** Due to the limited availability of Members, it is more likely that you will secure an appointment with the Legislative Assistant who works on the issues you wish to discuss. These staff members are the experts in their respective fields and advise the legislator how to vote.
- **Be on time.** Members of Congress and their staff have extremely busy schedules. If you are even a few minutes late, you may miss an opportunity to meet. Plan to arrive five to ten minutes early.
- **Keep it brief.** You will rarely have more than 15 minutes; use your time wisely and stick to one or two key legislative issues. Use your "ask." Plan ahead and bring a **leave behind packet**. Remember, to use stories from your experience with patients to highlight your key messages.
- **Stay in contact.** Follow-up with a thank you note highlighting your key points from the meeting and offer yourself as a resource in the future.

It may be helpful to read the **scenarios for meeting with your Member of Congress**. This document will brief you on the different types of meetings and response you can expect.

If you are visiting your Members and have any questions, please contact the Public Affairs staff. We often have materials already prepared on a variety of issues and are always willing to accompany AWHONN members on Hill visits.

Longtime Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neill is declared, "all politics is local." And it is true! A great way for you to affect change is to become involved in advocacy efforts at the state level. Many issues that arise at the national level duplicate themselves in state legislatures. Furthermore, you will likely find that your state lawmakers are more accessible than federal officials.

It is important to note that AWHONN Sections cannot endorse legislation or provide testimony without prior approval from AWHONN Headquarters. Please contact Public Affairs staff with any questions or concerns, either via phone, 202-261-2400 or email, legislation@awhonn.org.

Getting Started

The first step in state advocacy is to determine when your legislature is in [session](#). This varies by state (and by year) so visit your state legislature's website for more information.

The second step is to determine who your state legislators are. Visit [Project Vote Smart](#) and enter your zip code to learn about all the elected offices in your state. This will also show you which positions are up for election.

In addition, it is important to note that many state officials have a smaller staff than federal legislators. However, they are equally important and a vital resource. The staff structure varies by legislator and by state, so it is best to visit the legislator's website or call their local office to familiarize yourself with their setup.

There are many different resources for learning about state legislation. Many state legislatures have website that include free services which allow you to create a customized list of bills and topics you would like to track.

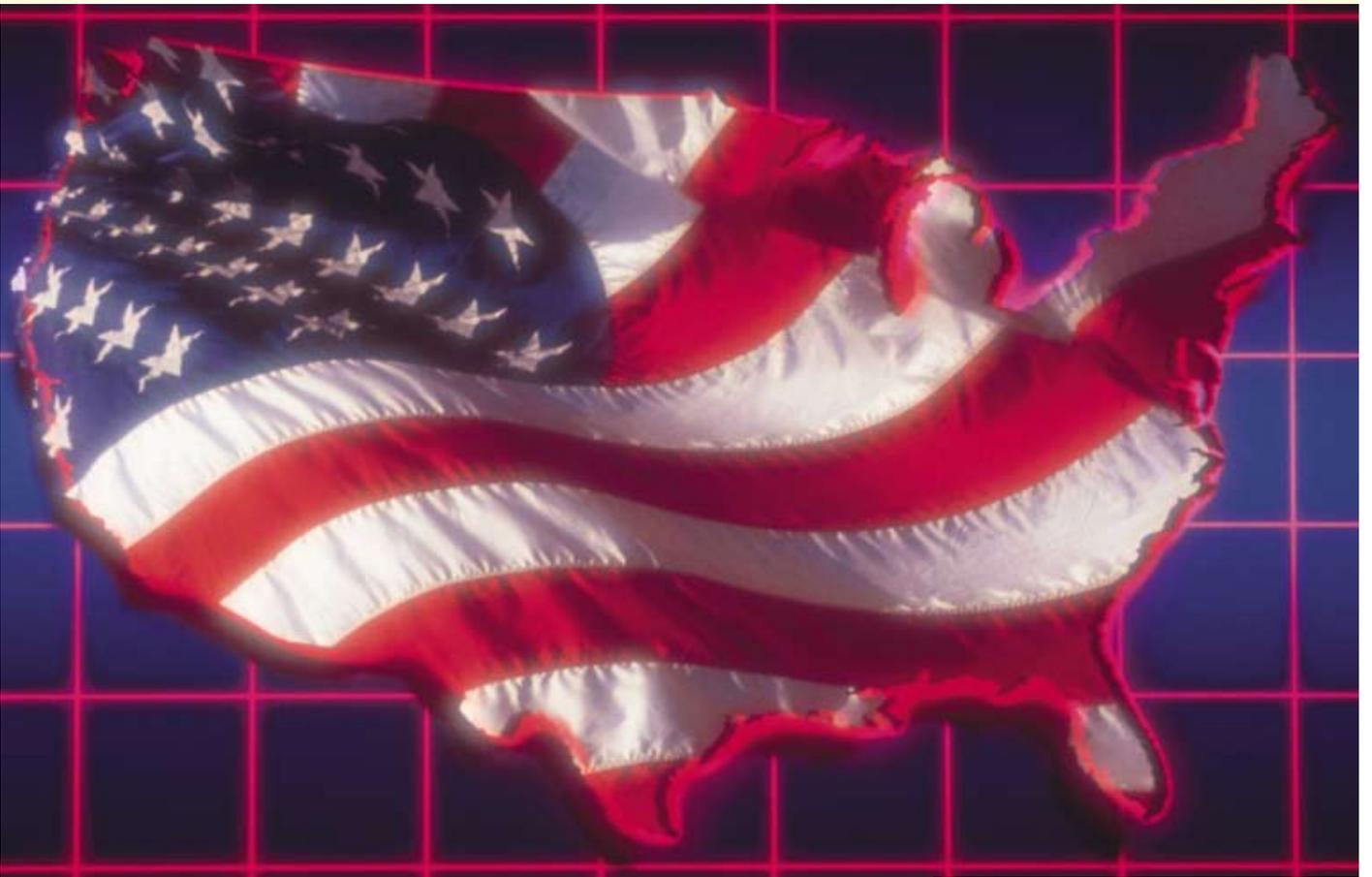
In addition, many organizations such as [American Nurses Association](#) and [American Association of Colleges of Nursing](#) have information on state level legislative efforts. In addition, in many states there are a variety of legislative nursing coalitions, which provide another avenue to become involved. These groups can be a great way to stay on top of the legislative landscape of your state. Before joining a formal coalition, again please reach out to AWHONN Headquarters.

Take Action

All of the advocacy methods previously discussed; letter writing, phone calls, and visiting, can be used at the state level. Please note, AWHONN's Legislative Action Center is not currently equipped for state level activities. Should an AWHONN section want to take action on a particular state issue, please remember to contact AWHONN Public Affairs for approval and assistance.

[Back to Content](#)

711



Legislative Resources



[Legislative Glossary](#)

[Library of Congress](#)

[Senate Website](#)

[House Website](#)

[National Council of State Legislatures](#)

[American Nurses Association \(ANA\)](#)

[American Association of Colleges of Nursing \(AACN\)](#)

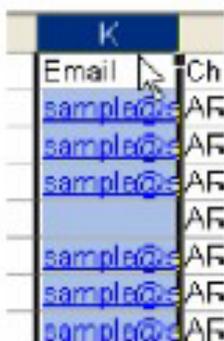
[*Back to Content*](#)

Creating email mailings

Microsoft Outlook is the easiest way to send out an email message. Yahoo and Gmail (Google's mail service) are free email services and both support this type of mailing, and with virtually unlimited storage and no fees; these are good services to try.

There are many other services you can use for this, but **AOL and Hotmail DO NOT work for this purpose.** AOL and Hotmail do not allow for bulk pasting of email addresses. To use these services, you'd need to import the entire list into your address book, create a distribution list, and put them on it individually. This is not advised as it is a lot of extra work for you, and would only be accurate the first time you do it as our membership list changes frequently.

To attain the list of emails from your membership reports, first download and open the report in Excel, via the "Section/Chapter Leader Tools" section of the "My Profile" portion of the AWHONN website. Follow the steps outlined in this section to generate a report. Open the report and "Copy" the email column.



Ch	Email
AF	sample@sample.com

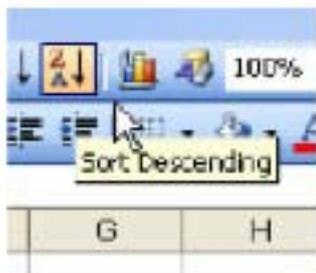
If you use Outlook to send email, all you have to do is paste this column directly to the BCC field. You should use the "BCC:" field instead of the "To:" field to protect the privacy of the email addresses. You should put your own address in the "To:" field.



If you use Yahoo, Gmail, or many other email services, you'll need to add a comma between addresses. To do this, use the following instructions:

K	
Email	Ch
sample@satx.rr.com	AF
sample@satx.rr.com	AF
sample@satx.rr.com	AF
	AF
sample@satx.rr.com	AF
sample@satx.rr.com	AF
sample@satx.rr.com	AF

First, highlight the email column, copy it and paste it into a new excel sheet. Then sort in descending order (Z to A) so all the blanks are at the bottom of the column. You only want to work with the rows that have email addresses.



In column B, cell 1, type =A1 & ','

	A	B
1	sample@satx.rr.com	=A1 & ','

Excel will then print the email address with a comma immediately following it.

A	B
sample@satx.rr.com	sample@satx.rr.com,

There are two ways to copy this formula to the remaining addresses.

- 1) Place the mouse on the bottom right corner of cell B1 so it shows a thick, dark plus sign (+), then drag down the length of the addresses so that each cell is complete with commas.

OR

- 2) Highlight cell B1 and copy and then click into cell B2 and drag to the end of the column. Right click and choose "Paste Special". In the menu, choose "Formulas" and click ok. The column of email addresses should now appear with commas immediately following them.

	A	B	C
1	sample@satx.r.com	sample@satx.r.com,	
2	sample@satx.r.com		
3	1sample@satx.r.com		
4	2sample@satx.r.com		
5	22sample@satx.r.com		
6	3sample@satx.r.com		
7			

Highlight the column and copy.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	sample@satx.r.com	sample@satx.r.com,			
2	sample@satx.r.com	sample@satx.r.com,			
3	1sample@satx.r.com	1sample@satx.r.com,			
4	2sample@satx.r.com	2sample@satx.r.com,			
5	22sample@satx.r.com	22sample@satx.r.com,			
6	3sample@satx.r.com	3sample@satx.r.com,			

Paste into the BCC field of Yahoo or Gmail email messages.

YAHOO! MAIL Yahoo! Mail
Yahoo! Mail

Mail - Addresses - Calendar - Itzapad

Send Save as a Draft Spoil Draft Cancel

Insert addresses | Add CC - Famous BCC

To:

Rec:

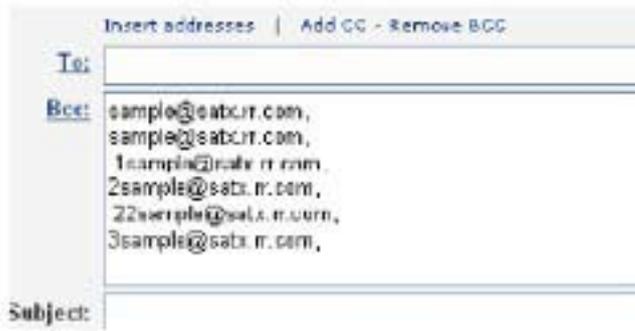
Subject:

Attach files

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Help

File

It will show up like this:



The screenshot shows an email composition interface. At the top, there are two links: "Insert addresses" and "Add CC - Remove BCC". Below these, the "To:" field is empty. The "Bcc:" field contains a list of email addresses: "sample@sabcir.com", "sample@sabcir.com", "1sample@sabcir.com", "2sample@sabcir.com", "22sample@sabcir.com", and "3sample@sabcir.com". The "Subject:" field is also empty.

Put your own address in the "To:" field. Your message is now properly addressed for bulk mailing.

Take Action

1 COMPOSE MESSAGE

Message Recipients:

- Your U.S. Senators

Delivery Method:

- Email
 Printed Letter

Subject:

URGENT ACTION NEEDED!

Editable text:

(edit or add your own text - 8666 characters left)

As a nurse and your constituent I am deeply concerned about the devastating effects postpartum depression can have on new mothers, their babies and families. I strongly urge you to cosponsor the Melanie Blocker Stokes MOTHERS Act.

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a devastating mood disorder which strikes many women after pregnancy. It is a serious and disabling condition that affects anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of new mothers. In the United States, there may be as many as 800,000 new cases of postpartum conditions each year. While the exact causes are unknown, if

Tip: Cutting-and-pasting? Save as [plain text](#) first.

Your Closing:

Sincerely,

Your Name:

2 SENDER INFORMATION

This system requires that you provide your name and contact information. This information will not be used for any purpose other than to identify you to the recipient.

Your Contact Information:

Prefix ([required](#) by some officials)

Select... ▾

First*

Last*

Email*

Address*

City*

State*

Alabama ▾

ZIP*

ZIP + 4

Phone

- Remember Me! ([what's this?](#))
 Sign me up for the Action E-List.

Example of Action Alert



UPDATE

URGENT - PPD Bill Sees Action!
URGENT ACTION NEEDED!

[Take Action!](#)

Postpartum Depression Legislation Sees Action!

A new piece of legislation, called the Advancing America's Priorities Act (S. 3297), was recently introduced in the Senate. This legislation combines a number of bills, including the postpartum depression legislation, into one package.

Support S. 3287 - and the ultimately Melanie Blocker Stokes MOTHERS Act - by reaching out to your Senators TODAY!

If you no longer wish to receive e-mail from us, you can unsubscribe [here](#).

powered by
capwiz 

Addressing Correspondence

To a Senator:

The Honorable (full name)

__(Rm.#)__(name of)Senate Office Building

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

To a Representative:

The Honorable (full name)

__(Rm.#)__(name of)House Office Building

United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

Please note, for the Speaker of the House use "Dear Madam Speaker or Mr. Speaker:"

Committee Leadership

The Honorable (full name)

Title (Chair or Ranking Member)

Committee

Chamber

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman X:

Dear Ranking Member X:

Example Written Letter

August 5, 2008

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison
United States Senate
284 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-4304

Dear Senator Hutchison,

As a nurse and your constituent, I see everyday the devastating effects postpartum depression can have on new moms, their babies and families. I urge you to co-sponsor S. 1375 Mom's Opportunity to Access Help, Education, Research, and Support for Postpartum Depression, or the MOTHERS Act.

Postpartum depression is a common and serious problem affecting new mothers throughout the U.S. Between 10-20% of new moms suffer from postpartum depression with nearly 800,000 new cases each year. About 40% of women who suffer from postpartum depression go undiagnosed and only 15% of diagnosed women seek treatment. If treatment is sought, the recovery rate is 90%.

The "MOTHERS Act" would provide screening and education to new moms on postpartum depression and psychosis, and it seeks to increase research on the topic. I urge you to co-sponsor important legislation. By supporting this bill, your actions would create a step in helping to create a better understanding of postpartum depression and provide new mothers additional treatment options. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Name
Full Address



Leave Behind Packet

What Should Be Included?

- One page fact sheet, that includes your “ask”
- Contact information (e.g.: a business card)
- “About” page. This sheet should be included if you are with a formal group. If representing AWHONN, please contact Public Affairs for the official document.
- Relevant information, studies, or reports as it relates to the topic and the district.

Possible scenarios for meeting with you Representative and/or staff members

(Modified and used with permission from the AAP Federal Affairs Office)

Scenario 1: “Don’t call us, we’ll call you.”

The Representative (and/or staff) listens carefully and asks few or no questions. When you ask about his/her position, you are told he/she will think about your comments. You are thanked politely for your time. This is a totally noncommittal meeting.

What do you do?

First, realize this is probably the single most common type of legislative meeting. It is not a bad one. You have established who you are, whom you represent, what the issue is, and what your position is. For some meetings, this is as much as you can expect or hope to accomplish.

But you can do more.

- First, respect the fact that the Representative has not made a decision; don’t try to press him/her for a commitment he/she is not ready to make.
- Do ask questions to find out what forces might influence the decision.
- Build your case--cite impact on the pediatric population back home. Cite other supporting groups.
- Discern the level of grassroots pressure. For example, you might find out whether mail has been received and, if so, is it for or against your position. Also, try to discover if he/she has been contacted by other groups.
- Always ask whether you can provide additional information. The single most persuasive document you can provide is a one-page fact sheet outlining how this bill will directly affect your state or district. Other useful information includes a list of cosponsors, especially in the Representatives’ party.
- Always leave your name, address, and phone number (if you don’t have a business card, write this on the fact sheet you leave)
- Talk about another issue--briefly. Don’t waste time. If you are meeting with staff, this is a good time to discover if he/she is from your state and other information, which could provide the personal touch that adds to the relationship. You would be surprised how many of the staff went to college with your sons or daughters, or had cousins in your town, etc.

As with any important meeting, **follow-up is crucial**. This is particularly true for the undecided. Write a thank you letter, including any information requested at the meeting. For the undecided, it is also helpful to get others to write and/or phone the Representative to urge him/her to support your position.

Scenario 2: “I’m new” or “I don’t know anything about health”

Although this might happen when you meet with the Representative, it is more likely to happen with staff. There is a lot of turnover on Capitol Hill. Many staff—particularly those in the personal offices (with whom you will meet most often) are young and may know little about health issues. In fact, unless your Representative sits on a key health committee, don’t expect the staff to know much about the issue.

Staff cannot be experts on all issues. In the personal offices, the staff may cover five or six issues, and it may not be a combination which makes sense. For example, he/she may cover defense, education, health and transportation. Now for some of you, it is easy to draw comparisons and links among these issues, but the staff may not see it that way.

But contrary to what you think, this is not bad news!

This is the best time to begin to develop your position as a valuable resource to the staff—the expert on child health issues. Best of all, you are expert from back home rather than a “Washington insider.” You are the constituent on whom they can rely for accurate information, even when it is very technical. You become an asset; you can make them look good; you can make his/her job easier.

- Start out with the basics. State who you are, what type of pediatrics (or health related profession) you practice, where your office (hospital) is located.
- Give simple information on the issue or issues. Material pertinent to your state or district is particularly valuable.
- Don’t use medical jargon. Assess level of comprehension. Don’t talk down.
- Let them ask questions. In fact, encourage them to do so. And treat all questions seriously.
- In addition to the follow-up outlined previously, do what you can to develop the relationship. Letters, phone calls, and visits when you are in Washington are all tools to use. But don’t be a pest.
- Remember, new staff become experienced staff. Personal staff can and do move to committee assignments. If you encourage an interest in health, he/she could become a good friend in the future.

Scenario 3: “I agree” or “preaching to the choir”

After you introduce the issue, you are told that the Representative agrees with your position.

Great! Now What?

Instead of ending the conversation right then and there, you can use this opportunity to establish your position and to gather information.

- First, don’t waste time, but do ensure that there is a commitment at this time
- Ask if the Representative is a cosponsor or would he/she be willing to sponsor, cosponsor, or introduce the bill.
- Ask if more information would be helpful, particularly relative to how this issue affects your state or district or how many children would be affected. If more information is needed, try to get a specific idea of what would be helpful without being overload.
- Ask about other organizations that support/oppose the Representative’s position. Ask if you can help solidify support or identify the opposition.

Follow-up to this meeting may be as difficult as with scenario 2, but you will need to keep lines of communication open, so that you can be useful as the expert resource.

Scenario3-A: “I agree, but. . .”

These are variations of the previous type, but with a twist. You may hear many excuses at the end of “I agree, but These days, the typical twist is (or “but”) there is no money, so how can we ?

Don’t let this throw you!

You may not have all the answers. But, find out what the objections are and how the Representative can be satisfied. If you cannot supply the answers at the meeting, ensure them you will find the answers and will get back to them soon.

Scenario 4: “I disagree with everything you say, and . . .”

The adversarial interview is one you are really worried about. But, it almost never happens--honestly!

Representatives and staff may disagree with you, but they will not attack you or your position. In fact, they do not like to disagree with you at all. Remember, you are the constituent.

The other person essentially takes charge of the meeting and disputes everything you have tried to say.

What do you do?

- Keep calm. If you are meeting with staff, try to determine whether this is a personal opinion (it does happen) or the position of the Representative. If it is the opinion of the staff, a meeting with the superior, perhaps back home, might be the next step.
- End the meeting as soon as possible.
- You will need to be in contact with this office again, but you may need reinforcements. Reinforcements may be information, other members of your chapter, or finding the right contact back home that can talk to him/her.



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