



How to Advocate As a State Agency Employee

Recognizing that State agencies may have policies regarding employee contact with members of Congress NASHIA developed this informational sheet to help State government employees participate in the public policy process and also adhere to a State agency's policy.

I. Individuals

As a citizen, you may fax, e-mail* or call your Senator or Representative or any other member of Congress who may influence your areas of interest. You may need to use stationery, if you fax or attach a document to an e-mail, which does not reflect your position in State government.

Pointers for Calls and Correspondence:

1. Include your address/phone so the office holder may respond to you.
2. Keep your message short and to the point.
3. In general, your communication should specifically state:
 - What you want the legislator to do (i.e. support, oppose, co-sponsor, contact the assigned committee, etc.).
 - The bill name, number, committee assignment, and current status, if applicable.
 - A brief explanation for why you want the legislator to take the position.
 - Your appreciation for their time and interest.
4. Remember to ask friends and family members to contact their legislators too.

***It is strongly recommended that due to security issues, individuals either fax or e-mail correspondence to their congressional delegation in lieu of writing letters (snail mail).**

II. Councils/State Agencies

If agency policy permits, you may call or contact your congressional delegation on behalf of your agency or your State's advisory council. The pointers for calls or correspondence described above also apply to State sanctioned communications. In addition, you may:

1. Contact your State's Washington, D.C. based office, if one exists, to let them know of TBI issues that impact your State. You might consider asking your director or commissioner to make the initial contact or asking the Governor to include TBI funding as a priority with regard to State priorities that then is conveyed to the D.C. State office.

2. Establish relationships with key staff in your Congressional office to facilitate information exchange between the State's TBI program and elected officials. Often, once a relationship is established, the staff person will contact you regarding issues that come before Congress, including constituency issues.
4. Let key State legislators, such as your budget or appropriations committee chair or leadership, know of your interests at the federal level. Often, members of the same political party know one another and may be willing to contact members of Congress on your behalf. Sometime, a State legislature will even submit a resolution to Congress urging them to support or oppose a certain position.
3. Ask other State agencies, councils and quasi-governmental entities to contact your congressional delegation or key congressional people on your behalf. Examples of agencies you may want to approach include your Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, Governor's Council on Disabilities, Assistive Technology Council, State Independent Living Centers Council, State Injury and Violence Prevention program, etc.
4. Share information with other councils on federal TBI issues. Often, other advisory councils will provide updates on public policy issues with their members and constituencies.

III. Non-profits Organizations and Coalitions

The state affiliate of the Brain injury Association of America, or U.S. Brain Injury Alliance support groups, Protection & Advocacy Systems are natural partners to assist with advocacy. Other disability organizations, such as Epilepsy Foundations, UCP, and Centers for Independent Living may also help through their grassroots networks. Prevention programs, such as Think First, Safe Kids, and Safety Councils; medical and rehabilitation professionals, organizations, and providers; and insurance industry all may be appropriate collaborators on legislation that has common ground. One way to be effective is to organize a coalition or group of agencies and councils to support TBI issues and activate their advocacy networks.

IV. Support & Follow Up

Prior to contact with members of Congress, or other disability councils and organizations, it may be helpful to have a fact sheet on TBI issues pertinent to your State that can provide an overview of the prevalence and incidence of TBI, a description of needs, current service delivery, and how federal TBI issues have impacted your State. A general fact sheet or a fact sheet on a specific-issue, such as TBI reauthorization, may be useful to distribute to a coalition of agencies and organizations who have similar goals. During the annual Congressional Brain Injury Task Force Awareness Day activities, you may want to provide State program contact information and other program information to your congressional delegation so that they are aware of services in your State. This will help them to better understand how some of the federal programs may assist individuals with TBI in your State, as well as help them when constituents when they contact them for assistance.

It is IMPORTANT to keep NASHIA informed of your communication with members of Congress. In addition, if you have reports or materials to share about your program, please share with NASHIA so that the public policy staff and committee are well informed of initiatives and efforts in the States. NASHIA also maintains materials and information on the NASHIA website under the public policy sections. Go to www.nashia.org to access the materials.

Meanwhile, if you have questions concerning State or federal policies or want to become more involved, please email Susan Vaughn, NASHIA Director of Public Policy, at publicpolicy@nashia.org or call 573-636-6946 or contact Becky Corby, Government Relations at rcorby@ridgepolicygroup.com or call 202-480-8902.