



Oncology Nursing Society

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Instructions for Requesting Meetings with Members of Congress

Members of Congress welcome invitations to meet with constituents, attend constituent organizations' meetings/conferences, and/or tour health care facilities. It is your right to extend an invitation to your elected officials to attend an ONS Chapter meeting, speak at an ONS annual chapter meeting or awards dinner, or request an opportunity to meet with the Member either at home or in Washington, DC. However, all such requests must be made in writing and sent by fax or email to the Member's scheduler or appointment secretary.

The first step in extending an invitation to your Member of Congress to attend an ONS event or submitting a request to meet with the Member is to find out the name of the scheduler/appointment secretary and learn out of which office s/he works. In addition, you need to confirm the fax number or email address to which such written meeting requests and invitations need to be sent. The easiest way to find out this information is to call either the local or Washington, DC office of the Member and ask the receptionist for this information. Once you have this information, you are ready to undertake the following steps:

- (1) If you are seeking the meeting on behalf of your ONS chapter or in your capacity as an ONS member, work with your chapter colleagues to put the letter on ONS letterhead. You can utilize the template letter below to assist you in developing your formal request. Be certain that your letter contains your full name and contact information at the end as well as your title, degrees, etc. If you were instructed to specify the issues and topics you will be discussing, please refer to the ONS Health Policy Agenda or check with one of ONS's Health Policy Associates for more information if you need assistance. ♦
- (2) The letter(s) should be faxed or emailed (the particular Congressional office prefers) to the attention of the staffer whose name you were given by the receptionist. The cover page or email text accompanying your request should specify that you are submitting a meeting request or invitation for **INSERT THE DAY OF THE WEEK, MONTH, DAY, YEAR**. If you were instructed to specify the issues and topics you will be discussing, please refer to the ONS Health Policy Agenda or check with one of ONS's Health Policy Associates for more information as needed.
- (3) Calls should be made - the day after the letters are faxed - to the staffer to whom you sent the information to ensure that the fax or email has been received. When calling, you should ask for the scheduler/appointment secretary and indicate that a request already has been sent in but that you are calling to confirm it has been received. If they did not receive the letter, another fax or email should

♦ Note: If you are not certain your employer would support your seeking a meeting with an elected official as part of your ONS work, be certain to provide your home contact information and utilize all of your own stationery, email, fax, and other resources.

be sent as a follow-up. You should then make another follow-up call to ensure that the letter has indeed been received.

- (4) In the event that you speak to the scheduler and s/he indicates that a decision cannot be made for a while, ask politely if there is a specific date in the future when it would be appropriate for you to call and check on the status of the request. Often the scheduler will give you a particular date or a week when s/he recommends you call back. Other times the staff may indicate that s/he will be in touch once a decision is made.
- (5) In the event that you receive voicemail when you call to confirm receipt of the request and do not hear back from the scheduler within a week, a follow-up call should be made at that point to confirm receipt. The key to getting the Member to attend your event or securing a meeting with the Member is a lot of follow-up. It takes time but is worth it.
- (6) If you are seeking the Member's attendance at an ONS event, it should be made CRYSTAL clear to the scheduler that if the Member of Congress cannot make it that you really would like someone from the local office to attend and represent the Member. If no one can attend, it is appropriate to ask if the Member can send a statement or letter that can be read in his/her absence.
- (7) If you are seeking a meeting with the Member and are told that s/he is not available during the time frame for which you are seeking a meeting you can do one of two things: (a) offer another set of dates/times that would work for you and see if the Member is available then, or (b) indicate that you are disappointed and hope to meet the Member someday and would like to meet with the District Director or another senior staff member instead.
- (8) Once a meeting has been scheduled with the Member, inform your colleagues (it is advisable to bring at least one if not two other oncology nursing colleagues with you to the meeting) and begin to prepare for your meeting. You should be clear about your roles and who is saying what in the meeting. Be sure to assign someone the responsibility for working to put together your "leave-behind" materials that you will provide to the Member at the end of your discussion. Be sure to bring a camera and have a picture taken with the Member; make certain to give copies of the photos to the Member and his staff as well as to ONS Headquarters for posting on the Legislative Action Center. For more information about how to prepare and conduct a meeting with a Member of Congress, see *Oncology Nursing Society Top Ten Tips for Congressional Meetings* for more information and guidance (<http://www.ons.org/lac/pdf/10TipsMeeting.pdf>).
- (9) Once you have arranged for a Member of Congress to attend your chapter meeting or conference, inform your colleagues and make all the appropriate logistical arrangements. Be sure to have someone present who can take pictures and make certain to give copies of the photos to the Member and his staff as well as to ONS Headquarters for posting on the Legislative Action Center.
- (10) Be certain to send a formal thank you letter to the Member of Congress for the opportunity to meet with them or for attending your meeting or conference. In addition, send a thank you letter or email to the scheduler expressing your appreciation for his/her assistance and letting him/her know how wonderful it was to meet with the Member or have the Member participate in an ONS event. Building a strong relationship with the scheduler will help facilitate future scheduling requests and helps ensure a good working relationship with one of the most important, and often overlooked, staff in a Congressional office.

Other Tips for Submitting a Meeting Request

Be flexible. Do not assume that if the Member is not available the date/week/time you have requested that s/he does not want to meet with you. Members of Congress have incredibly busy schedules and often are booked weeks, if not months, in advance. As such, if your initial request is denied, politely, yet firmly indicate that you would like to work to get on the Member's schedule in the future and ask if you might look at the calendar now to see what is available going forward.

If the Member has been particularly supportive of ONS legislative proposals and/or has expressed public support for ONS health policy priority concerns, you might consider giving an award to the Member. In the event you would like to give an award to the Member, you should specify that in the request letter

Sometimes requests for "just a photo" can be honored and granted more easily than if you are requesting time for a "real" meeting. If you suspect that you might be better off requesting a "photo opportunity" rather than a substantive meeting, you should make this more modest request. Some ONS members have found that once they are standing with the Member smiling for a photo they are able to engage the Member in conversation and turn a "grip and grin" moment into a substantive policy discussion. As such, even for a photo opportunity, you always should bring a set of ONS leave-behind materials with you to pass along to the Member and his staff. In addition, once you have met the Member for a photo opportunity, it is often easier to schedule a substantive meeting later on in follow-up.

**TEMPLATE MEETING/INVITATION
REQUEST LETTER TO MEMBERS OF CONGRESS**

Date

The Honorable **First Name Last Name**
U.S. Senate/U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510/20515

Dear *Senator/Representative Last Name*:

On behalf of the Oncology Nursing Society Chapter of **INSERT NAME**, I am writing to respectfully request a meeting with you to discuss a number of issues of priority to me and my Oncology Nursing Society colleagues. We are hoping that you might have time to see us **during the week of April 10th when you will be home for the spring recess.**

As you may know, the Oncology Nursing Society is the largest professional oncology group in the United States and exists to promote excellence in oncology nursing and the provision of quality care to those individuals affected by cancer. As part of its mission, the Society honors and maintains nursing's historical and essential commitment to advocacy for the public good. We have approximately **XXXX** members in our chapter and there are approximately **XXXX** ONS members in **STATE**.

I recognize and appreciate that you maintain a very busy schedule and that you receive many requests to meet. However, with **XXXXX** people in our state estimated to be diagnosed with cancer this year and another **XXXX** estimated to die this year of this terrible disease, I know that you share our concerns about the ongoing ability of our nation to provide quality cancer care to all in need, particularly individuals **in your district/our state.**

I very much hope that your schedule will permit us an opportunity to meet so we can discuss ways that we can work together to reduce and prevent suffering from cancer. I will follow-up with your scheduler shortly to schedule a meeting. Should you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at **###/###-#### or INSERT EMAIL ADDRESS.** I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

First Name Last Name, Degrees
Oncology Nursing Society/Title (e.g. President, State Health Policy Liaison)
Phone Number
Email Address