



Oncology Nursing Society

125 Enterprise Drive • Pittsburgh, PA 15275-1214
Toll Free: 866-257-4ONS • Phone: 412-859-6100 • Fax: 412-859-6165
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Health Policy Advocacy Toolkit: Working Together for Policy Advances

Welcome!

You're an advocate now! Actually, you were one before, but maybe did not realize it.

Nurses are the most trusted healthcare providers—for 15 years in a row! It's that honest voice that ONS wants you to use as an activist.

You've taken the first step and are now in Washington, DC, representing your peers, ONS chapter, and ONS as you speak truth to power. Ask questions, add comments, offer suggestions, but most of all, be engaged!

ONS leadership and staff are here to assist, so don't be shy. You have a constitutional right to advocate with your elected officials. We are only asking you to be nurses, and tell your Representative and Senators, and their Congressional staff, meeting about the issues.

Enclosed is a packet of information to review before going to Capitol Hill. We all look forward to exciting and fulfilling meetings, and your participation is a big part of it!

Together, ONS will make a real difference in health policy advocacy.

Sincerely,

Alec

Alec Stone, MA, MPA
Health Policy Director
Oncology Nursing Society
444 N. Capitol Street, NW #601
Washington, DC 20001
(412) 859-6401 office
(301) 661-1428 cell
astone@ons.org



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Active Engagement

How Congress Works

The United States Congress is the bicameral legislature of the federal government, consisting of two chambers: the US Senate and the House of Representatives. The Congress meets in the Capitol in Washington, D.C. Both senators and representatives are chosen through direct election. Members are usually affiliated with the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party, and only rarely to a third party or as independents. Congress has 535 voting members: 435 Representatives and 100 Senators.

The members of the House of Representatives serve two-year terms representing the people of a single constituency, known as a "district". Congressional districts are apportioned to states by population using the United States Census results, provided that each state has at least one congressional representative. Each state, regardless of population or size, has two senators. Currently, there are 100 senators representing the 50 states. Each senator is elected at-large in their state for a six-year term, with terms staggered, so every two years approximately one-third of the Senate is up for election.

How Laws Are Passed in Congress

After a Senator or Representative introduces a bill, it is assigned to the appropriate committee, according to subject area, for mark-up. Here it is studied and rewritten. Hearings are held to solicit both public and special-interest views. During mark-up, the committee considers the specific language of a bill and may amend or change it. When the bill clears the committee, it goes to the floor for general debate and action.

Once both houses pass a bill, a conference committee made up of both Senators and Representatives works out any differences between the House-passed and Senate-passed versions. The final conference version must be approved by both houses, then the bill goes to the President to be signed into law. The President may veto the bill. In that case a two-thirds veto override vote in both houses is required for the bill to become law.

Elected officials work for us, the people. Never forget that. You have a constitutional right to advocate on behalf of interests that are important to you. Let your voice be heard.

Relationship Building

What is advocacy?

- Building a relationship with your Members of Congress.
- Issue identification, research, and analysis.
- Lobbying/advocating for or against legislation.

Advocacy can be any or all of the above. It can be a simple "drop in" to your member of Congress's office, or as complex as providing detailed analysis as to how a piece of legislation could impact a patient's access to care. Any activity that supports an idea or cause is advocacy, including lobbying a bill, relationship building, and educating legislators and the public.

What should I do to prepare for Hill Day?

- Be able to provide basic information about ONS and your area of expertise/interest;
- Bring plenty of business cards to hand out at your meetings on the Hill;
- Wear professional attire and comfortable shoes for walking between visits meetings;



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- Bring a camera so you can take pictures with your legislators.

What should I bring to the Congressional meetings?

- You will be given fact sheets on site at Hill Day.
- Before each meeting, coordinate with others on who will lead the discussion;
- Leave behind the handouts for the staff to review;
- Offer to be a resource for the office on policy issues.

During a Legislative Visit

1. Prepare a one to two-minute brief introduction of yourself and/or your group. Then allow the group to introduce themselves and where they are from.
2. Start with a positive note by finding some common ground. If your legislator has supported a priority issue for ONS (voted for or co-sponsored a bill), thank them for that support.
3. Please keep in mind your meeting will only last 15 to 20 minutes so you want to avoid getting distracted with non-essential conversation. Provide a brief overview of the issues to discuss. While legislators and their staff are educated on most issues, they are typically “generalists” unless it pertains to specific issues within the jurisdiction of their committee assignment.
4. When discussing specific topics, it is important to use personal anecdotes to explain why the issue needs action. Explain a position with facts and use personal stories to back it up. Legislation affects nurses and their patients. Make sure they understand the personal ramifications or benefits from their actions.
5. Ask the legislator to take a specific action, such as co-sponsoring a bill or voting for a pending measure. If a legislator agrees to support an issue move on to the next one.
6. Show openness to counterarguments and politely respond to them if it seems appropriate to do so. Do not argue with the legislator or their staff.
7. If the answer to a question from the legislator or staff is not known to you, it is okay to say so. Simply reply that you are not sure of that answer, offer to get an answer and follow up with that answer. This actually provides a good opportunity to keep the conversation going after you have returned home.
8. If you are unable to meet with your member of Congress, do not underestimate the influence of their staff! While they may be young, they are educated, well informed, and help provide direction to their boss’s decision-making process.
9. If there is time, it is appropriate to ask the legislator for a picture. If you use Twitter, Facebook or Instagram, post your picture with a nice comment, making sure to include your legislator’s Twitter handle or hashtag so they see your positive feedback and can share your post with other constituents.
10. Thank them for their time upon leaving.

Meeting Logistics

- I. Be prepared to not necessarily meet in an office, especially for meetings with the U.S. House of Representatives. Offices are small, so some meetings are held in hallways outside the office or you may walk down to the cafeteria.
- II. Bring business cards and offer your cell phone number to the legislator or staff. Ultimately, you want to build this relationship, so provide a direct contact number.
- III. If you get lost, ask a Capitol Hill Police Office for directions – they are very helpful.
- IV. Allow time for long lines at the entrance of buildings for security screening. Wear comfortable shoes and leave metal objects — change, keys, etc. — in your bag.



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After Your Visit to Washington, D.C.

- I. Write a thank you email summarizing your visit. Thank the member of Congress again for his or her support on the issues and most importantly, if there was a certain bill they agreed to co-sponsor or vote for, remind them of that that.
- II. Maintain ongoing communication with the legislator and their staff through letters, emails, or calls. Offer to serve as a resource to them on health care issues.
- III. Find out when the legislator will be back in the district and offer to host a visit to your ONS chapter.
- IV. Keep the ONS Washington office informed about your advocacy efforts and activities. The DC Office can then follow up with your legislators. Tips for an Effective Congressional Visit

General Do's and Don'ts for Congressional Meetings

Do thank them for taking time to meet with you.

Do thank them for considering your viewpoint.

Do be forthright and informative in your communications.

Do stick to an agenda.

Do keep it simple and brief.

Do provide an "Ask." Tell them what you would like for them to do.

Do provide the legislator/staff with a persuasive argument.

Do cite specific issues and data and use personal anecdotes.

Do offer to provide additional background information on the subject you are discussing.

Do offer to assist the legislator's staff in any way possible.

Do let the legislator/staffer know why you care about the issue. Share personal stories.

Do tell the legislator/staffer how the issue affects your patients.

Do expect your legislator to be responsive to your views.

Don't be narrowly ideological.

Don't be argumentative or confrontational.

Don't be close-minded.

Don't be overly technical. Speak plainly.

Don't lose track of time.

Don't expect your Member of Congress to drop everything for your concerns.

Don't threaten them (e.g., "If you don't vote for this bill, I won't vote for you in your next election.")

Remember, your elected officials want to be helpful if they can. If you follow the above tips, you should be able to have a productive visit with your legislators and be well on your way to establishing a good working relationship into the future.

Final Notes

It's Not What You Say, It's What They Hear: 5 Components of Effective Messaging

1. **Create a master narrative:** Whether you're launching a health communication campaign or running for president, make it clear that you stand for something.
2. **Support your story:** To back up your master narrative, offer adequate support. To best support your narrative, make your messages easy to understand, use relevant language targeted toward your audience and use symbols to tell your story.



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3. **Be authentic:** When communicating your message, strive to be yourself. It's important to know who you are and who you're not. Recognize and highlight your strengths, but make sure you also know your weaknesses, and lean into them if necessary.
4. **Tell a story:** Never underestimate the power of storytelling in conveying your message. Data and facts are great ways to support your message, but telling a good story can be just as — if not more — effective in many instances. To resonate with the masses, a good story must be scalable, full of details and true to the person or group communicating the message.
5. **Control your story:** You know your story best, so make sure you're the one controlling its direction. To stay in control of your story, avoid ambiguity, be transparent and be prepared to reframe the message if necessary.

Resources

ONS Health Policy Advocacy: <https://www.ons.org/advocacy-policy>

United State House of Representatives: <http://www.house.gov/>

United State Senate: <http://www.senate.gov/>

White House Cancer Moonshot Initiative: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/CancerMoonshot>

NCI Moonshot: <http://www.cancer.gov/research/key-initiatives/moonshot-cancer-initiative>

American Nurses Association: <http://www.nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/Policy-Advocacy>

Nursing Community: <http://www.thenursingcommunity.org/>

US House Nursing Caucus <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/House-Nursing-Caucus-Members.pdf>

US Department of Health and Human Services <http://www.hhs.gov/>

CMS <https://www.cms.gov/>

NIH <https://www.nih.gov/>

NINR <https://www.ninr.nih.gov/>

FDA <http://www.fda.gov/>

HRSA <http://www.hrsa.gov/index.html>