



Information,
Inspiration and
Advocacy for People
Living with HIV/AIDS

Grassroots Advocacy 101

Making Your Voice Heard in Congress and the White House

Understanding Congress

The United States Congress consists of two distinct groups of elected officials: the Senate and the House of Representatives.

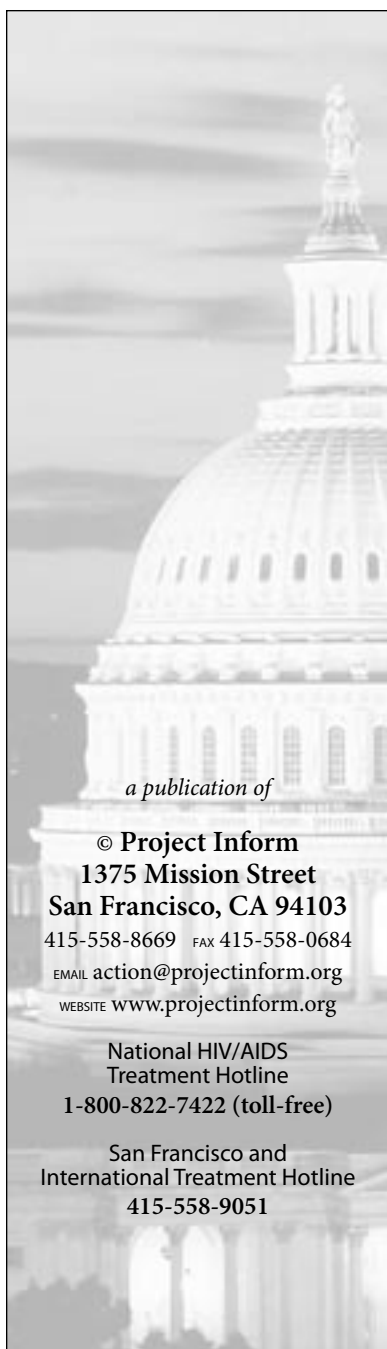
There are 435 members in the House of Representatives and 100 in the US Senate. You are represented by one Congressperson (elected to the House of Representatives from your district) and two Senators (elected to the Senate from your state).

According to the US Constitution, these individuals are expected to represent you in Congress. However, to do that, they must hear from you. Establishing and developing an ongoing, effective relationship with your elected officials helps to educate them regarding your issues and ensures that their votes aren't cast without your input.

The US Congress handles their workload through a system of Congressional Committees.

Our complicated federal legislative process requires a Congressional Committee system to handle the workload. HIV/AIDS-related funding and legislation are handled in a number of these committees, including Appropriations; Labor and Human Resources; Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs; Judiciary; and Budget.

The most important work is done at the committee and subcommittee levels. Members negotiate the final details of new legislation and/or funding before a bill emerges for a floor vote. While it is still generally most effective for you to contact and make requests of your own elected officials, there may be times that it is strategic to ask your representative to contact a specific committee member.



a publication of

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1-800-822-7422 (toll-free)

San Francisco and
International Treatment Hotline
415-558-9051



One good source of information on federal elected officials is

The Almanac of American Politics

which can be found at most bookstores.

If you need help doing this type of research, contact Project Inform at 415-558-8669 and ask for the health care advocacy department. You can also email us at action@projectinform.org.

1

Getting to Know Your Elected Officials

First things first.

Know who your elected representatives are. There are several ways you can identify your elected officials.

- Look in the Government pages under the US Government Offices listing in the white pages of your telephone directory. Your local Congressperson's contact information will be listed under *Congress of the United States*.

There may be more than one representative listed in your area. Call the local office to find out who serves your district. Your US Senators are listed in the same section under *Senators*. You can call your representatives' local office to get the phone and fax numbers for their Washington offices. If you have email capability, you can ask for an email address as well.

- You can also call your local City Hall and ask for the Registrar of Voters. They will be able to tell you who your Senators and Representatives are.
- If you have Internet access, you can identify your representatives using your zip code at www.house.gov.
- You can also find a comprehensive legislative directory with contact information for all Representatives and Senators on Project Inform's website at www.projectinform.org. Follow the links to the policy page.
- If you don't have Internet access but would like a copy of this legislative directory, call Project Inform's health care advocacy department at 415-558-8669 or email action@projectinform.org.
- Keep the names and numbers of your representatives handy for easy reference.

2

Secondly, do your homework.

It pays off in the future. Be aware of your elected official's political party, committee assignments, political points of view and, if possible, their voting record on your issues. Other facts can be helpful:

- What kind of constituency does the legislator represent—rural, urban, suburban?
- What are the principal influences in the district—labor, business, government?
- What is his or her background—education, previous work, etc.?
- How are his or her campaigns funded?
- How long has the legislator been in office?
- Most legislators have biographies on their websites with information about their backgrounds and political philosophies. You can find their websites at www.house.gov and www.senate.gov. You can also call your legislator's office and ask for a biography to be mailed to you.

Communicating with Congress

Effective communication with Congress can make the difference between program funding increases and cuts or between laws that protect you or someone you care about and laws that create more difficulty or discrimination. You have valuable information that can help your legislator make the policy decisions that will impact your life. There are a number of ways you can communicate your position.

Communicating with your legislators and their staff is one way to possibly impact the course of legislation early in the process. There are many points in the process where you can make a telephone call, write a letter (via mail, email or fax) or visit with your legislator and/or staff. How you communicate is your choice, but each method has advantages and disadvantages. However, it is important to keep in mind that one contact will not make a relationship. You need to be consistent in your communication and may need to contact your representative several times and in different ways during the course of a legislative session.

You don't have to be an expert on an issue to express an opinion—you will not be grilled on your knowledge of an

issue. The most important thing that you bring is your own personal story about how a piece of legislation or a budget issue would affect you or those you care about. It is important to stress how the issue that you are supporting or fighting would specifically affect your community, organization or district. If you have any facts on who might be served or hurt, what organizations might benefit or be harmed or any other economic

effects in your area, let your representative know. Remember, the legislator should care about the effects of policy on his or her home district.

If you know who your opposition is on the legislation and what arguments they are using, it is helpful

to counter with your own perspective. For example, if you are arguing against cuts in Medicaid while fiscally conservative groups are arguing the program is a drain on resources, you might want to talk about the cost savings that occurs if people have access to treatment that keeps them out of the hospital.

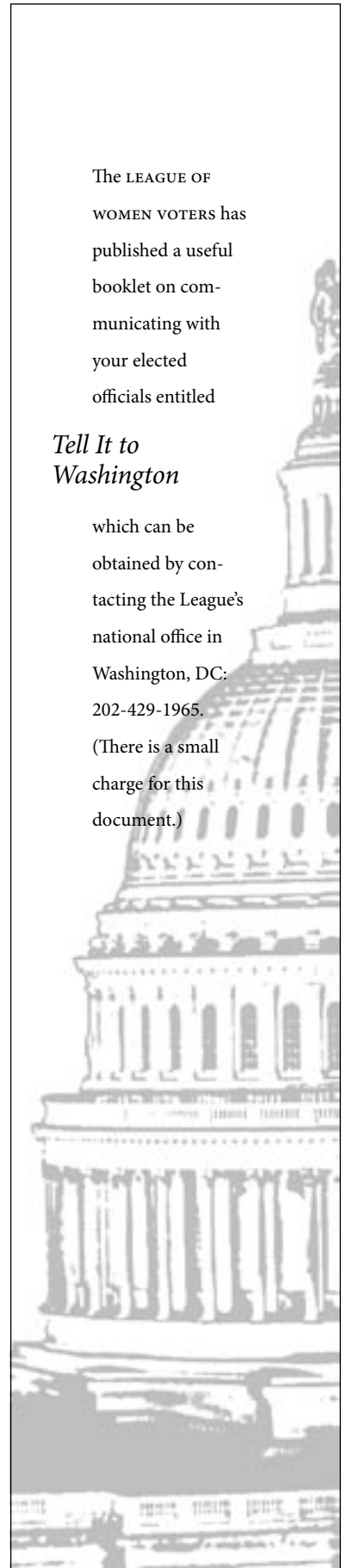
The information on the following pages outlines a few of Project Inform's tips on communicating with federal elected officials.



The LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS has published a useful booklet on communicating with your elected officials entitled

Tell It to Washington

which can be obtained by contacting the League's national office in Washington, DC: 202-429-1965. (There is a small charge for this document.)



COMMUNICATING WITH CONGRESS

Public Testimony

Public hearings are one way that legislators take the “pulse” of the public on specific issues. The hearings are called by a committee investigating a legislative issue. If you want to testify, call the committee holding the hearing and ask to be placed on the witness list. You can also ask your representatives to help you in this process.

Follow up with a letter confirming your request to appear. Since the spots are limited, it is best to be strategic about who speaks and what issues they raise. Once you have testified, you may be called back on issues that you can provide information on. Keep in mind:

- Be personal—use your own experience as your starting point.
- Put your most important points at the beginning of your testimony in case you are not able to complete it.
- Use real life experience whenever you can to illustrate a point; be sure you can substantiate it.
- Use resources such as Project Inform, other community based organizations and your own research to prepare your statement.
- Be brief—try not to go over 5 minutes.
- Be courteous—if you can’t answer a question, be honest and offer to get the information only if you can follow up.
- Dress appropriately.
- Send copies of your statement to your own legislator urging support or opposition.
- Send copies of your statement to the media.



USE YOUR OWN

EXPERIENCES

AS YOUR

STARTING POINT.

KEEP TELEPHONE

MESSAGES SIMPLE,

SPECIFIC AND

COMPLETE.

Telephone Advocacy

While effective, telephone calls are generally best when time constraints make letters or personal visits impossible. Calls are usually logged on a chart in the legislators’ office and can have an effect on how he or she votes. Keep in mind the following:

- Calls to your district office are as effective as calls to Washington, DC unless your issue is being heard or decided within 24 hours.
- Identify yourself. State your name, address, why you are calling and that you are a constituent, if you are.
- Keep your message simple, specific and brief. Do not go over 3 or 4 minutes.



AS AN EXAMPLE:

“I am calling to urge the Senator to vote in favor of _____.”

OR:

“I am calling to ask the Congresswoman to oppose cuts in funding to _____.”

- When advocating for passage or defeat of a specific piece of legislation, make sure you give the bill number. When asking for funding for HIV/AIDS programs, try to give the specific dollar amounts you would like the representative to support.
- Ask for a written response. Provide your mailing address.

COMMUNICATING WITH CONGRESS

Written Correspondence

If you are writing to your Congressperson, remember that personal letters are the most effective. They are regarded with much more importance than postcards or form letters.

Whenever possible, write letters on your own stationery and mention any appropriate organizational or professional affiliations. Handwritten letters are appropriate and considered extremely effective as they indicate a strong personal connection to the issue.

KEEP THE FOLLOWING IN MIND:

- Address what specific issue you are writing about in your introduction. Reference a bill number if possible.
- Try to keep your letter to one page.
- Always remember to explain how the issue affects you, your agency, your community or those you care about
- Be constructive. If possible suggest a solution or different approach.
- Always use the proper form on all correspondence:

Finally, be sure to include your name, address and phone number in your correspondence to ensure that you receive a reply from your representatives. Once you have received a reply, you can also send a response. This will indicate your concern and allow you to reiterate your opinion. If your representative agrees with you, it allows you to thank them and let them know that you will be following the issue. If he or she disagrees, a response allows you to put forward more reasons why your approach is reasonable.

REMEMBER THAT
PERSONAL LETTERS
ARE THE MOST
EFFECTIVE.



Email Correspondence

Sending emails to your representatives is still fairly new. Most federal legislators are online, and email is clearly a quick and efficient way to communicate with elected officials. However, not all offices check email daily, so you should contact your representatives' office and ask if email is a preferred method of communication.

As with all communication, it is important to be personal when emailing your representatives.

Because it is easier to email a quick note than to handwrite a personal letter, it is possible that emails—like form letters and postcards—might not be weighed very heavily. Make sure you discuss only one issue at a time and always give your name and mailing address.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO
BE PERSONAL WHEN
EMAILING YOUR
REPRESENTATIVES.

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
(House of Representatives)
Washington, DC 20510
(20515 for House)

Dear Senator _____:
(Dear Representative _____:)

Text/Body of letter

Sincerely yours,
Your Signature

COMMUNICATING WITH CONGRESS

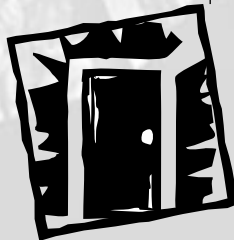
Personal Visits

A personal visit with your representatives is one of the most effective ways to develop a relationship with your legislators. Don't forget to include your legislators' staff in your visit, specifically those who will be likely to work on your issues. Don't be bashful—personal visits are easy to set up.

KEEP THE FOLLOWING IN MIND:

- If you are going to be in Washington, DC, call the member's office as far in advance as possible. Generally, afternoon appointments are easier to get. Project Inform's public policy department can assist you in formulating a meeting strategy. We can also provide you with written information on the issue(s) you will be discussing.
- Don't be disappointed if you get an appointment with staff. They will be the individuals who will be following the issue most closely. Staff is an important link to a busy elected official. Even if you meet with your representative, ask if the pertinent staff can attend the meeting.
- Be concise. Try not to take up more than 15 or 20 minutes meeting with the elected official.
- Prepare a one-page background sheet on your issue to leave at the office with your contact information.
- Use meetings strategically to discuss important issues or educate your elected officials.
- Remember to ask for some commitment that will advance your issue and/or further your relationship. It can be as simple as inviting the legislator to visit an agency in your area.
- Send a follow up letter thanking the legislator for his or her time.

If you are unable to get an appointment with the Congressperson, get the location's address and drop by of his or her office. If the Senator or Representative cannot meet with you in person, meet with a member of his or her staff instead. Leave appropriate materials and follow up your visit with a letter of thanks to the Representative and/or his or her staff.



PERSONAL VISITS

ARE EASY TO

SET UP; SO

DON'T BE BASHFUL.

DISTRICT VISITS ARE

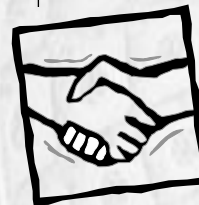
AN IDEAL TIME TO

TALK WITH YOUR

REPRESENTATIVES.

District Visits

Several times a year, your representatives will be visiting their home districts. This is an ideal time to talk to them, as they usually come home to get feedback from constituents. If you are on your representative's mailing list, you should be notified when these visits will occur.



You will usually have better luck if you are going in as a coalition of groups with a unified message. Project Inform can assist you in seeking out appropriate groups to contact when setting up your visit.

If you are unable to get an appointment, your representative's local office can tell you when he or she will be in town and whether they are holding public meetings. Sometimes the meetings are issue specific and sometimes they are general meetings.

You can bring your questions and/or requests to the appropriate meetings and air them publicly. This serves the additional purpose of helping to educate others about your issues.

Correspondence to the White House

Finally, when you're communicating with federal officials, don't forget the White House. The President also represents you.

You can write, email or call the White House and voice your opinions and concerns on specific topics. And as with your Congressional representatives, your communication is logged and counted.



President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500
202-456-1414 fax 202-456-2461
Email: president@whitehouse.gov

There are other officials in the federal administration that you will need to contact from time to time. Some of these officials include the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, the Director of the Office of National AIDS Policy and officials at the National Institutes of Health and Food and Drug Administration. While they are not elected representatives, their actions on healthcare policy issues can affect you directly.

It is important to be strategic when contacting federal administrative officials. Bombarding their offices with calls and letters could actually backfire. However, on issues that are receiving major public attention, it is important these officials hear from those most affected.

If you need help or any further information on making your voice heard in Washington, DC, you may call Project Inform at 415-558-8669 and ask for the public policy department.

Good luck with your advocacy efforts! Together we will make a real difference.

PI Action ...

THE GRASSROOTS NETWORK OF PI ACTION

YOUR VOICE IS NEEDED MORE THAN EVER!

Be a Part of the PI Action Network

Since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, grassroots advocacy has been at the heart of many political victories. People most impacted by HIV/AIDS have called, written, emailed, and met with their elected officials to demand an adequate response by the federal government. Those personal stories are one of the most

powerful and effective ways to influence those we elect to represent us. While we have made many strides over the years, there is still much work to be done. You can make a difference by joining over 2,000 PI Action members and becoming an influential HIV/AIDS advocate!

What is PI Action?

PI Action is the largest national grassroots network of individuals advocating on HIV/AIDS research, treatment, and health care issues. PI Action members write, email, and/or call their Members of Congress, the President, and federal administrative officials about federal HIV/AIDS legislation and funding issues. Sometimes PI Action members are asked to contact pharmaceutical companies to ask for faster access to promising treatments or lower drug prices.

In the past year, members have advocated for increased funding of HIV/AIDS programs; reauthorization of the Ryan White CARE Act, the Early Treatment for HIV Act, the Patients' Bill of Rights; and strong medical privacy regulations.

What do PI Action members receive?

As a PI Action member, you will receive regular emails with updates on federal legislative activity and *PI Action Alerts* on timely issues that need your attention. *PI Action Alerts* provide substantial background information on the issue and sample letters to help you craft your message (phone, email, or hand-written) to your elected officials. Members also receive contact information for their federal representatives and tips for communicating effectively with them.

If you do not have email access, we will mail *PI Action Alerts* and updates to you about 4-6 times a year, along with contact information for your representatives and our *Grassroots Advocacy 101* manual.

What does it cost to join?

Other than a few stamps and occasional long-distance phone calls, the only cost of you participating in this important network is a few minutes of your time every month communicating with your representatives about the issues that affect you every day.

How do you sign up?

To join PI Action, complete the form below and send it in. Or, you can sign up online at www.projectinform.org/healthcare/action.html.

Once you've joined, you will start receiving Alerts and updates. If you have questions about PI Action, contact Ryan Clary at (415) 558-8669 x224 or action@projectinform.org.

Mail to:

Project Inform
c/o PI Action
205 13th Street, #2001
San Francisco, CA
94103-2461

Fax to:

PI Action Coordinator
415-558-0684

Email to:

action@projectinform.org

YES! Sign me up to be a part of the PI Action!

➡➡➡ I would like to receive PI Action Alerts and updates by mail or email (check one).

Email (please print clearly) _____

Name _____ Phone () _____

Address _____ Fax () _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

PI Action
is a program of

PROJECT
inform

Information,
Inspiration and
Advocacy for People
Living with HIV/AIDS