



Advocacy Handbook

In this handbook, learn:

- How Washington affects your organization and community
- How you can influence Congress
- How a bill becomes a law and your role
- Five ways to integrate advocacy into your work

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People in every nation enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens, not as a mob swayed by the powers that be. Let us not forget that “responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”

Pope Francis
quoting the U.S.C.C. B.’s Pastoral Letter,
Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship



Does what happens in Washington *really* affect my organization and community?

The happenings in Congress can often feel far removed from the day-to-day activities in programs and communities outside of Washington, but the decisions that are made on Capitol Hill have a significant impact on funding, on how social services operate, and on eligibility for assistance programs. Here is just a brief overview of how Congressional decisions affect individuals, communities, and Good Shepherd Programs:

Funding for programs

- Each year Congress determines how much funding various programs will receive through the budget process. Cuts in funding for low-income programs directly impact the needs of clients and the extent to which organizations can serve them.
- State funding is often tied to federal funding, so budget cuts at the federal level often translate into state and local funding shortfalls.
- The federal budget sets the tone for what will happen in Congress in a given year with priorities determined by how funding is allocated. Good legislation often gets stalled because it proposes new funding that wasn't included in the budget.

Q: What federal programs do your clients rely on and what would happen if Congress cut funding for them? What state programs receive federal funding?

Follow the budget process at www.gsadvocacy.org and www.cbpp.org.

*Labor generously and unceasingly according to
the spirit of your calling.*

St. Mary Euphrasia

Does what happens in Washington *really* affect my organization and community? (con'd)

Legislation



- Throughout the year, bills are proposed and voted on dealing with issues that impact communities and clients in Good Shepherd programs.
- Some bills seek to make changes to laws governing programs that either expand or restrict who is eligible for them. For example, the Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act expanded eligibility for Medicaid to qualified lawfully present immigrant children and pregnant women, regardless of their length of time in the country.
- Some legislation is designed to establish new programs, modify the nature of current programs, or dissolve programs that Congress thinks aren't working. For example, the legislation to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act created several new programs to combat violence for youth and expanded some current programs.
- And then there are bills that don't create programs, but make changes to established law that can either benefit or harm vulnerable populations. For example, there have been efforts in Congress for several years to pass a bill to increase in the minimum wage and legislation to make permanent tax credits that keep millions of people out of poverty .

Q: What laws inhibit vulnerable populations from living with greater economic security and how would their lives change if the laws changed? What changes would help make programs more responsive to the needs of those served by Good Shepherd programs?

Check out our website for the latest information on issues and legislation related to Good Shepherd priorities (www.gsadvocacy.org).

*You are the roots of the tree, be all virtue, all strength, for the most
noble mission is reserved for us.*

St. Mary Euphrasia

How do I fit in?

How YOU can influence Congress

Members of congress get their information from:

- The media
- Their staff members
- Their colleagues
- Paid lobbyists and
- CONSTITUENTS LIKE YOU

What you can do:

1. Find out who your Representative and Senators are:

- On the internet, go to www.house.gov or www.senate.gov to look through the congressional directories. You can also call Capitol Hill Information and just provide your zip code and the operator will provide the names of your Senators and Representative:

Senate operator, 202-224-3121

House operator, 202-225-3121



Great works take their rise in the midst of all sorts of trials and labors.
St. Mary Euphrasia

How YOU can influence Congress (con'd)



2. Write a letter to Congress

(From *Families USA* website)

- **Address your legislator properly.** For a salutation, use "Dear Representative (last name)" or "Dear Senator (last name)."
- **Use your own words.** Personal letters are much more effective than postcards or petitions. Clearly state the topic you are writing about and your position on it in the opening sentences. For example: "I'm writing to oppose steep cuts in Medicaid and Medicare."
- **Refer to bills by name or number if you can,** but don't delay a letter if you don't have the exact bill number.
- **Stay on one topic.** If you want to write about other issues, send another letter later on.
- **Give reasons for your position.** As appropriate, use personal experience or a concrete example to make your case.
- **Raise questions.** A well-formulated question can get a personal response.
- **Keep it short. One page is best!** Use two pages only if necessary for clarity and completeness.
- **Be polite, positive, and constructive.** Don't plead, and never threaten or insult.
- **Be timely.** Write before decisions are made and action is taken. But don't write too long beforehand--a letter six months before a vote will probably be forgotten.
- **Make sure to include your name and address** on both the envelope and the letter. (For e-mail, include your full name and address at the end of the e-mail.)
- **Write to thank your legislators when they take an action you agree with.**

*How holy is your mission!
You are planting the tree of life; its fruits should endure.*
St. Mary Euphrasia

How YOU can influence Congress (con'd)

3. Call your members of Congress

(From *Families USA* website)



- All Senators and Representatives maintain one or more offices in the state or congressional district they represent in addition to their offices in Washington, DC. You can find the phone number for that office in the U.S. government section of your telephone directory, by calling information, or by visiting the websites of your members of Congress.
- If you wish to call their D.C. offices, you can reach your Senators or Representative through the Capitol switchboard. Simply dial (202) 224-3121 and ask for your Representative's or Senator's office.
- Ask to speak to the member of staff that is in charge with the legislation you are calling about. If it's a budget related concern, ask to speak with the Legislative Assistant who works on the budget.
- State clearly your motive for calling. Example: "I am a constituent of Senator _____ and am urging her to vote against the budget cuts."
- When you call, ask if your Senator or Representative could send you a written response. This will help ensure that your call gets counted. If you get a busy signal, keep calling!

Charity and justice bind us to each other and to the whole institute.
St. Mary Euphrasia

How YOU can influence Congress (con'd)



4. Visit your members of Congress

(Adapted from *NETWORK*)

- Visiting your Members of Congress (MOC) is an effective way to influence their position on an issue. You are their constituents and you are the one that will vote for or against him/her, so your opinion on an issue matters.
- *You don't need to go to Washington.* Every MOC has a local office near you. You can meet with them while they are home.

♦ To arrange the visit:

- => Find the Congressperson's district office nearest you by visiting www.gsadvocacy.org (Click on "Take Action" button; then scroll to the bottom of the page and follow the directions).
- => Contact the scheduler in the district office to ask for an appointment with the aid who handles your issue.

♦ Plan for the visit:

- => Review background information on the issue and current legislation relating to it.
- => Know about your MOC. What committees is he/she on? What votes has she/he made in the past regarding your issue? You can look at the Member's web page, Project Vote Smart (www.vote-smart.org) and Congress.org.
- => Gather materials to leave with your MOC such as brochure about your agency and a one-page summary of your position on the issue.
- => Decide who will say what at the visit and who will begin the visit and bring it to a close. Think of questions for your MOC.
- => The visit may only last about 20 minutes. Don't plan to use all that time for talking. Leave time for questions that the staff person might have and that you want to ask.

Set to work: let your zeal be pure, universal, and persevering.
St. Mary Euphrasia

How YOU can influence Congress (con'd)

♦ The visit:

- => At the start of the meeting be sure to identify yourself and the purpose of the visit.
- => If possible, acknowledge prior positions your MOC has had or votes he/she has made that you appreciate.
- => Make your request for the MOC as specific as possible (Vote against budget cuts).
- => Be clear and concise, polite but firm and constructive rather than critical.
- => Use examples from personal experience, along with supporting facts and statistics.
- => Bring the conversation back to your message if it goes off track.
- => If there are questions you cannot answer, make a note of them and volunteer to find the information and get back to the staff later.
- => Get feedback: ask for the Member's position on the issue. If the staffer does not know, ask for a specific date by which they will get back to you.
- => Leave the materials you brought for the staffer.

♦ Follow up on the visit:

- => Write a thank you note to your MOC or the staffer with whom you met and re-emphasize key points in your conversation.
- => Send the answers to any questions you said you'd research.



Be stouthearted, faithful to your resolutions, generous. In this way, you will be capable of great works.
St. Mary Euphrasia

How YOU can influence Congress (con'd)



5. Use the media

(From *NETWORK* and *Child Welfare League of America*)

Write a letter to the Editor of your local newspaper or an Op-Ed (opinion) piece.

- => Letters to the editor and Op-Ed pieces are amazingly powerful advocacy tools. The editorial pages are among the most widely read sections of newspapers and magazines. They are closely monitored by legislators to find out what voters are thinking and hearing. They can encourage editorial writers to take a stand or they can influence other members of the media to probe an issue more deeply.
- => Check out preferred length, style and format by reading letters and Op-Ed pieces currently in the publication. Look for submission requirements either in the publication or on its website. Most publications prefer letters to be 250 words or less, but Op-Ed pieces can be somewhat longer.
- => Timeliness is key. Many major newspapers now publish letters responding to articles, editorials or other letters the day after they appear.
- => For a letter, include a reference to the article, letter or editorial, to which you are responding. (e.g. "As someone who has experienced poverty firsthand, I find John Cole's assertion that current welfare laws are working to be far from the truth (Op-Ed, 4/5/05)."
- => Time your Op-Eds and letters to correspond with a holiday, a high visibility issue, or an event that highlights your issue.
- => Make sure your lead sentence is compelling. You want to draw the reader's attention.
- => Limit your letter/piece to one topic.
- => Try to provide a local slant by including the impact of the issue on your local community. If using a sample letter, take time to rephrase in your own writing style.
- => Make your writing lively but reasonable. Verify facts, and make sure quotes are accurate. Depending on the issue, consider using humor or a personal story. Refrain from personal attacks.
- => Include your name, organization (if applicable), address and telephone number. Newspapers will typically only publish a letter/piece if they are able to contact the signer to make sure s/he is the author.

How YOU can influence Congress (con'd)

- **Organize press conferences and briefings on relevant issues.**

=> Highlight new studies or data documenting how your community would be affected by proposed changes.

=> Showcase positive reforms in your state and community and what might happen to them if proposed policies are enacted.

=> Alert the media to events that would provide good visuals, including meetings with your Representative or Senators. Invite media representatives to your programs.

- **Meet with the Editorial Board of your local newspaper.** Use this meeting to turn the editors' attention to your issue.

- **Call in to radio/TV talk shows** that are discussing your issues and make your case.

Do my actions make a difference?

YES!! Your letters, calls, emails and visits to your Senators and Representatives can influence how they vote. They need to hear from their districts; you are their constituents and you have power over whether they get re-elected.

FACTS:

In 2004, The Congressional Management Foundation surveyed Senate and House staff. Their findings showed that if a member of Congress has not arrived at a decision on an issue:

- **99% of staffers** surveyed said that **in-person visits** from constituents have “some” or “a lot” of influence over the member’s decision.
- **96% of staffers** said that **contact from a person who represents many constituents** (e.g., organization leader) has “some” or “a lot” of influence over the member’s decision.
- **92% of staffers** said that a **lobbyist’s visit** has “some” or “a lot” of influence on a member’s decision.
- **88% of staffers** said that **phone calls** have “some” or “a lot” of influence on a member’s decision.
- **83% of staffers** said that **individualized postal letters** have “some or “a lot” of influence over a member’s decision.
- In general, the staffers surveyed agree that **personalized** letters, faxes, and emails are more effective than form letters, faxes or emails. (Note: NAC leaves its preformatted letters to Congress editable so that they may be personalized.)

*Survey results from www.cmfweb.org

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW	YOUR ROLE
A bill is prepared by a Member of Congress.	<i>Suggest provisions to be included in bill.</i>
Bill is introduced in either the Senate or the House by one or two sponsors and many co-sponsors.	<i>Help find co-sponsors for the bill through letters, calls or visits.</i>
The bill is assigned a committee* depending on its subject matter (an immigration bill would be assigned to the Judiciary Committee).	<i>Through visits and letters, work with the committee to help its members understand the bill and to prevent harmful alterations.</i>
Hearings are held to discuss the bill.	<i>Attend or testify at hearings.</i>
The committee votes on the bill.	<i>Phone, write or visit committee members to support bill.</i>
If the bill passes through committee it is sent to entire legislative body for a vote.	<i>Phone, write and visit swing members.</i>
If it passes, bill is sent to other chamber of congress.	<i>Help find co-sponsors in other chamber.</i>
Bill is assigned and reviewed by appropriate committee.	<i>Work with committee members to strengthen support for the bill.</i>
Hearings are held.	<i>Testify at hearings.</i>
If the bill passes committee, it is brought to the chamber floor for a vote.	<i>Lobby swing voters.</i>
If the bill passes it may have passed with amendments. House and Senate versions must be reconciled in a conference committee made up of representatives of both chambers. Once bill is reconciled, it is brought back to both floors for a vote.	<i>Lobby members of the conference committee to protect the bill from harmful amendments.</i>
If the bill passes both chambers as amended by the conference committee, it is sent to the executive for signature.	<i>Publicize the bill's passage and generate support for executive approval of the bill.</i>
If the executive signs the bill, it becomes law.	<i>Through letters, visits or calls, express thanks for members who supported the bill.</i>

Adapted from: Maceachern, Diane. *Enough is Enough*, New York: Avon Books, 1994.

***NOTE: Both the Senate and the House have committees** that focus on specific issues/ bills/legislation. These committees are further broken down into subcommittees of a more specific nature.

Example: The Senate Judiciary Committee has jurisdiction over immigration legislation while the Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee deals with Food Stamp legislation.

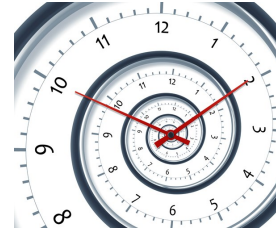
Strategy

- Find out what committees your representative and senators are on by going to their websites.
- Determine which committees in the Senate and the House have jurisdiction over the issues that affect your program and clients to know who to target.



*With Saint Paul I can say, "How can I remain indifferent
while anyone is suffering?"*
St. Mary Euphrasia

There's no time!
**Five concrete ways of integrating
advocacy into the work you do.**



1. Stay informed.

- Pick one issue that affects the clients you serve and follow that issue. Spend 15 minutes each day reading an article on that issue or going to a website that has updates on that issue.

=> Economic/Budget Policy: www.cbpp.org, www.ombwatch.org

=> Children's Issues: www.childrensdefensefund.org, www.cwla.org

=> Welfare/TANF: www.clasp.org

=> Housing/Homelessness: www.nlihc.org, www.naeh.org

=> Domestic Violence: www.ncadv.org, www.jwi.org/ic

=> Peace and Global Justice: www.jubileeusa.org, www.paxchristiusa.org

=> Immigration: www.nilc.org, www.immigrationforum.org, www.justiceforimmigrants.org

- Delegate different issues to your co-workers. At staff meetings or departmental meetings, give brief updates on those different issues.

2. Designate a half hour each week (every Friday after lunch, for example) **to:**

- make a phone call or write a letter to your representative or senator on the issue you have chosen to stay informed about. The National Advocacy Center's action alerts can help you determine what to say and how to say it.
- inform others about the issues that affect your clients by forwarding information about that issue to friends, family, co-workers or colleagues in other organizations.

*Do as I did. I had no great talents. I have done nothing great.
I only loved but I loved with all the strength of my soul.*
St. Mary Euphrasia

Integrating advocacy into the work you do (con'd)

3. Institutionalize advocacy!

- Encourage your Program Director, Supervisor or Executive Director to set aside advocacy hours weekly or monthly where each staff member has time to make calls or write letters to advocate for relevant legislation.
- Work with your Program Director, Supervisor or Executive Director to set up lobby days when your Representative is in his/her home district. Bring clients with you to speak about relevant issues.

4. Media outreach:

- Start building relationships with the press.
- Organize a press conference regarding how current legislation impacts the clients you serve. Select several clients who would be willing to speak to reporters.

5. Long term ideas:

- Get clients/residents/those you serve involved! Educate and Empower!
- Integrate organizing into your programs so that clients can take up the issues that matter to them and spearhead advocacy efforts.
- Host *Know Your Rights* Workshops or determine the organizations that have these workshops to educate clients on their rights and how to advocate for them.
- Have sample letters or postcards about a certain issue or legislation for clients to sign and mail to their representatives/senators.



Encourage one another in zeal.
St. Mary Euphrasia

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