

Tips on How to Engage Virtually with Your Lawmakers

As part of ACP's Virtual Advocacy Toolkit, this document outlines key mediums that chapters can utilize when advocating with their members of Congress. These mediums will allow members to engage virtually with lawmakers on ACP's key priority issues through sample letters, submitted electronically through our Legislative Action Center (LAC), sample talking points, for use in telephone conversations with lawmakers and/or staff, and sample tweets, for use through social medium platforms like Twitter. ACP has also developed issue briefs on each priority that includes background/context on the issue as well as the "ask of Congress." Chapters can utilize (and send) these issue briefs if/when they correspond with congressional staff. All materials are designed to be succinct and user-friendly to help facilitate advocacy through a virtual platform.

Advocate through Written Letters to Congress

ACP members have the option of sending a letter to their members of Congress through the ACP [Legislative Action Center \(LAC\)](#), which is itself a virtual platform. The LAC is user-friendly and allows you to easily identify your members of Congress, and send electronic letters to them using a sample letter provided for you that can be customized.

It's easy! You can access sample letters on ACP's key priorities simply by visiting the Virtual Advocacy Toolkit Homepage and clicking on the "Send Letter to Congress" option under a given issue area. Doing so will take you directly to that issue on the LAC where you simply follow the prompts. The sample letters are also accessible from the [LAC homepage](#), either through the rotating slide deck or the "Take Action" tab in the top toolbar.

Once submitted through the LAC, these sample letters go directly to your congressional offices in a manner and form deemed acceptable to congressional protocols and they will be routed to the appropriate congressional staff for review and reply. This form of virtual advocacy can be very effective, especially since hard mail correspondence to Congress through the U.S. Postal Service is prohibitive for health and safety reasons as a result of terrorist threats/acts, including anthrax.

Advocate By Telephone with Members of Congress and Staff

ACP members can also engage with their lawmakers through virtual conversations. There are two ways in which you can engage your members of Congress by telephone:

1. Leaving a message with congressional staff or through the main office voice mail system, if no other option.
2. Scheduling a conference call/telephone meeting with a member of Congress or key staff.

You can call the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask to be connected with the office you want or call the office directly. For direct dial numbers, refer to the phone lists for the [House of Representatives](#) and the [Senate](#).

Leaving a message with congressional staff or on the main voice mail system

Every congressional office has a main telephone number that constituents can call to either reach a specified member of the congressional staff or register their views on a given issue. If you know the name of the congressional staff who handles health care issues, you can simply ask to speak with that person or, if they are unavailable, leave a voice message on their individual voice mail system. Because congressional staff are so busy, it is often the case that you will be transferred to the staffer's voice mail system where we suggest you leave a message requesting a scheduled time to discuss ACP's priority issues. You can also attempt to schedule time to speak with the lawmaker but in order to do that you will need to speak with the lawmaker's scheduler.

At times, when calling the main office number, you may have no choice but to leave a message on the main voice mail system. In that instance, we recommend briefly stating your position on the priority issue in question, which will be appropriately logged and transmitted to the appropriate staffer and, in some cases, the lawmaker as well. This may be the case if you call outside of normal business hours or if office hours are truncated, due to unusual or unexpected circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. At various times during the pandemic, many congressional offices were shuttered to mitigate the spread of the virus. However, offices have now largely adapted out of necessity and have implemented measures to ensure that constituent calls and inquiries can be addressed.

For your use in advocating via telephone, ACP has developed brief talking points for you on each priority issue. They can be accessed via the [Virtual Advocacy Toolkit Homepage](#) by clicking on the "Call your Members of Congress" option under any given issue.

Scheduling a telephone meeting with a member of Congress or key staff

When attempting to schedule a telephone meeting with your lawmaker (through the scheduler) or with congressional staff, we recommend you always identify yourself as a constituent of the lawmaker. This is important because any congressional office is particularly interested in the views of voters in the district, which means messages and requests from constituents will receive priority attention. We further recommend that you identify yourself as an internist/subspecialist/medical student representing the American College of Physicians and that you would like to schedule 15-20 minutes of time to discuss several health care priorities. When requesting a telephone meeting with the lawmaker, it may be the case that the scheduler tells you that the lawmaker is unavailable but that the Legislative Assistant who handles health care can speak with you. Please do not be concerned by having to speak with legislative staff as opposed to

the lawmaker. Legislative staff in congressional office are typically policy experts and they advise the lawmakers on all aspects of legislation.

Again, talking points are available on all of ACP's priority issues in the toolkit, as noted above, and we have also developed issue briefs on each priority that includes background/context on the issue as well as the "ask of Congress." As a follow-up to your telephone conversations, either with lawmakers or staff, we advise that you email to them the links to the respective issue briefs that you discussed during your conversation. Those links can be found under each priority issue area on [Virtual Advocacy Toolkit Homepage](#).

Advocate through Social Media (i.e. Tweeting)

Social media is another important tool for engaging with your members of Congress, and one of the most popular methods is through Twitter. Most all members of Congress are active on Twitter, have their own Twitter handles, and routinely share their views and latest news through this medium. It is a quick and easy way to get your message out and we do recommend that you follow your members of Congress on Twitter so that you can stay abreast of their latest legislative efforts.

Twitter allows you to send out a very brief message (up to 280 characters) to all of your followers that typically includes a link where more information is available. It is a great and effective way to advocate because information is made available in small doses.

ACP has developed some "[Social Media and Advocacy Tips](#)" to help guide you as you advocate via Twitter. We have also drafted sample tweets on each of ACP's priority issues that you can customize and send out via Twitter. Links to those sample tweets can be found under each priority issue on the [Virtual Advocacy Toolkit Homepage](#).

Twitter is but one tool on social media but there are many others, such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. We encourage you to utilize any and all social medium platforms to help amplify your advocacy message. Happy Tweeting!