Advocacy in Genetics on Capitol Hill

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Posted in the Resource Repository at:
Overview

• 111th Congress
• Genetic Alliance’s Legislative Issues
• Congressional Meetings
• Do’s & Don’ts of Advocacy
• Questions
111th Congress
2009 - 2010
House of Representatives

- 435 Members; 5 Non-voting Delegates; 1 Resident Commissioner
- 255 Democrats; 178 Republicans; 2 Vacancies
- Speaker of the House: Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D - CA)
- House Majority Leader: Rep. Steny Hoyer (D - MD)
- House Minority Leader: Rep. John Boehner (R - OH)
Senate

- 100 Senators
- 56 Democrats; 41 Republicans; 2 Independents; 1 Vacancy
- President of the Senate: Vice President Joseph Biden (D - DL)
- President pro tempore of the Senate: Sen. Daniel Inouye (D - HI)
- Senate Majority Leader: Sen. Harry Reid (D - NV)
- Senate Minority Leader: Sen. Mitch McConnell (R - KY)
How does a bill become a Law?

Adopted from the official website of Rep. Sandy Levin (D – MI)
Genetic Alliance’s Legislative Issues
Key Issues

• Genetic testing oversight
  – Genomics & Personalized Medicine Act of 2010 (HR 5440)
    ▶ Referred to the House Committee on Energy & Commerce

• Public access to federally funded research results
  – Federal Research Public Access Act of 2009 (S 1373/HR 5037)
    ▶ Senate
      » Referred to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
    ▶ House
      » Referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Committee Jurisdictions

Genetic Testing Registry

Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP)
- Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), Chairman
- Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY), Ranking Member

Energy & Commerce
- Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA), Chairman
- Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX), Ranking Member

Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs
- Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I – CT), Chairman
- Sen. Susan Collins (R – ME), Ranking Member

Public Access

Oversight & Government Reform
- Rep. Edolphus Towns (D – NY), Chairman
- Rep. Darrell Issa (R – CA), Ranking Member
HELP Committee

Sen. Tom Harkin (D – IA)  Sen. Mike Enzi (R – WY)
Energy & Commerce Committee

Homeland Security &
Governmental Affairs

Oversight & Government Reform

Rep. Edolphus Towns (D – NY)  
Rep. Darrell Issa (R – CA)
Tips for Advocates
Contacting Your Legislator

3 Basic Points to Remember:

1. Know your information: *why are you there?*

2. Appeal to your audience: *Member of Congress or Congressional staff*

3. Communicate your message clearly, concisely, and to the right person: *make the request*
Communicating with Congress

Most Effective Forms of Communication (1 – 10)

1. *Spontaneous letters from constituents*
2. *Office visits from constituents*
3. Articles in state/district newspapers
4. Telephone calls from opinion leaders in the state/district
5. Congressional Research Service
6. *Telephone calls from constituents*
7. Office visits from chief executive officers of businesses in the state/district
8. Editorials in state/district newspapers
9. *Office visits from delegations from interest groups, including constituents*
10. Telephone calls from state-elected or party officials

Source: Nonprofit Lobbying Guide
Frequently Asked Questions

- What should I expect now that I have arrived in Washington?
- What if I only meet with staff and not my legislator?
- I’ve never been inside a Congressional Office. What should I expect?
- What do I say when meeting with a legislator?
- What if the staffer seems unfamiliar with the topic that I wish to discuss with him or her and/or disinterested during the meeting?
- I strongly support or strongly oppose my local legislator politically. What should I do?
Common Meeting Situations

• “I don’t know anything about genetic research...”
• “I agree, but there is not enough time...”
• “I have other priorities...”
• “My boss will support this, but you have to get to the Committee Chairman...”
Do’s and Don’ts of Advocacy
“Do”…

- Identify yourself and Genetic Alliance every time you make contact
- Personalize your story – why did you come to Washington?
- Know the issue or the status of the legislation
- Be brief, polite and honest
- Be specific and practical
- Be open to further discussion
- Talk with legislators even if their positions differ with yours
- Ask the legislator for support
- Leave behind a one-page fact sheet summarizing your position
- Get the staffer’s contact information
- Send a thank you note after you get home
- Follow-up in a manner that is polite
“Don’t”...

- Expect a lengthy meeting with the legislator in his/her office
- Be disappointed if you don’t meet with the legislator personally
- Back the legislator into a corner
- Overwhelm them with too much information or jargon
- Be afraid to say you don't know
- Be argumentative or impatient
- Confront, threaten, pressure or beg
- Expect legislators to be specialists
- Take a political stance whether you support or oppose the Member
- Forget to make your proposal
- Forget to get the staffer’s contact information
- Forget to send a thank you note after you get home
What’s Next?

• Complete meeting reports

• Keep up personal contacts

• Stay engaged over the long term