

Tips for Meeting with Your Member of Congress

One of the most effective ways to educate legislators about policy issues is to meet with them in person. You will likely find that some Members are very familiar with school-based health centers (SBHCs), while others might be hearing about them for the very first time from you. Either way, with a little preparation, you can ensure that the Member comes away from your meeting with a better understanding of the vital role SBHCs play in providing our nation's children with health care.

Important Things to Remember:

- **Make an appointment** to meet with the Member or his/her legislative assistant (“LA”) for health issues. (See *Tips for Scheduling In-District Meetings*, available on NASBHC’s advocacy tools web page.)
- **Don’t be discouraged if your appointment is with an LA** rather than the Member himself or herself. It is the LA’s job to listen to constituents’ concerns and ideas, and to bring that information to the Member. Often the LA is very familiar with – and sometimes passionate about – the same issues you care about.
- **Do your homework.** If possible, try to learn about the Member’s position on your issue or related issues. Sometimes you can find this information on the Member’s website (see *Tips for Finding Contact Information for Your Legislator*, available on NASBHC’s advocacy tools web page.) Also, a quick internet search can yield news articles about the Member. Understanding your Member’s background and positions will help you plan what kind of information and resources will be most effective and relevant.
- **Be on time.** The Member or LA you are meeting is very busy and will probably only have a few minutes to talk with you. Don’t waste that precious time by being late.
- **Prepare and memorize a short introduction** (no more than two minutes) you can use at the start of the meeting:
 - Introduce yourself and anyone who is with you, including your affiliation(s) with SBHCs and state associations.
 - State the topic you want to talk about: SBHCs in health care reform.
 - State the “ask” – that is, what you want the Member to do: support including SBHCs in health care reform legislation.
 - Give the Member or LA a brief “leave behind”: a fact sheet on SBHCs and health care reform. Several fact sheets are available on NASBHC’s advocacy tools web page. Choose one that addresses the specific aspects of SBHCs and health care reform that you think will be most persuasive.

Starting with an introduction like this ensures that the Member will still receive your information even if the meeting is interrupted unexpectedly.

- **Be prepared to explain** what SBHCs are, how they work, and why they’re important. This meeting might be the first time the Member or LA hears about SBHCs – or s/he might be very familiar with them. Keep your background explanation as concise as possible.

- **Explain why the Member should support SBHCs and their inclusion in health care reform legislation.** Be sure to provide information about SBHCs in the Member's district or state. Explain how the people who live in the Member's district/state benefit from having access to SBHCs. (Also see SBHCs and health care reform talking points, available on NASBHC's advocacy tools web page.)
- If possible, **include an anecdote** illustrating how a SBHC was critical to the health of a particular student or family. Personal stories like this put a face on the issue and help the Member understand the very real ways SBHCs affect communities.
- **Respect the Member's time.** Be mindful of how long you have been talking and be prepared to wrap up your discussion when the meeting comes to a close.
- **Request that the Member or LA to take a specific action: support the inclusion of SBHCs in health care reform legislation, and vote for that legislation.** Members and LAs expect constituents to have an "ask". If you are meeting with a Member, ask him/her to commit to supporting SBHCs. If you are meeting with an LA, ask him/her what the Member's position is and s/he will likely vote.
- **Offer additional resources.** Give the Member or LA any informational publications (fact sheets, etc.) you have brought. If any questions came up during the meeting, promise to find the answer and share it with the Member. Be sure to let the Member know s/he can call on you if s/he needs additional information.
- **Follow up.** Send a thank-you note to the Member or LA as soon as possible after the meeting. Include any additional information that was requested.