

Tips for Writing to Your Legislators (**including sample letter**)

Congress has returned from its annual August recess, and our legislators are back at work on one of the most pressing issues of the decade: health care reform. NASBHC encourages you to contact your Senators and Representative. Our legislators need to know there is wide support for health care reform and school-based health centers (SBHCs).

One way to express your position is to write letters to your legislators. A suggested template is included below. It is very important to personalize your letters as much as you can to include information on the SBHCs in your state/district and how they support children's health. Although most Members of Congress do not find form letters persuasive, they do place significant value on **personal** correspondence from constituents. This is an excellent opportunity to broaden your Members' knowledge about SBHCs and to garner their support.

Tips for Effective Letters

- Be polite.
- Be clear and concise. Members of Congress and their staffs are very busy. Keep your letter as short as possible, while including all relevant information.
- Identify yourself as a constituent (if you are) or as a representative of an organization (such as a SBHC or state association).
- Explain your issue clearly. You are the expert on your topic. Give enough information for the Member to understand your position. If possible, illustrate the impact of the issue on his/her district/state with personal anecdotes and local/state data.
- Tell the Member what action you want him/her to take; e.g., support health care reform that includes SBHCs.
- Request a response. Ask what his/her position on the issue is or how s/he will vote on the bill.
- Offer yourself as a resource. Make sure your Member knows s/he can call on you for more information on SBHCs.
- Don't forget to include your contact information.

Sample Letter

Dear Senator OR Representative X:

As a constituent, and on behalf of the XXX school-based health centers (SBHCs) in the state of XX, I want to urge you to support health care reform that recognizes the vital contribution of SBHCs.

As you may know, SBHCs provide access to care in communities struggling to offer such services, result in economic savings, and contribute to a healthier and more productive student population. For example, because of their onsite treatment and focus on preventive care, they can reduce the number of inappropriate emergency room visits and hospitalizations and lower Medicaid expenses. SBHCs have also been shown to increase students' time in class and lessen health inequities.

[INSERT PERSONAL STORY OR INFORMATION SPECIFIC TO SBHCs IN THE STATE OR DISTRICT.]

I am very pleased that language authorizing a federal SBHC program and setting up mechanisms to reimburse SBHCs for services under SCHIP and Medicaid has been included in the House bill (H.R. 3200), and I hope to see similar language when the Senate bill is released.

In addition to SBHCs, I encourage you to include other school services in health care reform legislation. I support the position of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) on reducing the student-to-nurse ratio. I also support the efforts of the American School Health Association (ASHA) to ensure the establishment of a National Prevention and Wellness Strategy that would include schools as sites for providing prevention interventions.

I am aware that there is much work yet to be done to pass a comprehensive health care reform bill. As you move forward, I hope SBHCs will continue to be acknowledged as a critical component in the health care safety net. Please contact me to let me know your position on SBHCs in health care reform or with any questions you might have about the SBHCs in your district [OR STATE]. I can be reached at [INSERT YOUR CONTACT INFO].

Sincerely,

Please copy Susan (skilbourne@nasbhc.org) on any correspondence you have with Members of Congress. That information will allow NASBHC to track contacts with legislators and to be more efficient and strategic in our work to ensure that SBHCs are included in the final legislation.

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