

How to Set Up a Congressional Meeting

1. Identify your members of Congress.

Go to www.aota.org and click on the [AOTA Legislative Action Center](#) to identify your members of Congress (1 member of the House of Representatives and 2 Senators). First, type in your zip code (sometimes you need to know the extra four digits) to reveal the Congressional profiles. Each member's profile will show contact information, office locations, as well as the member's background, committee assignments, and his or her positions on legislation affecting occupational therapy.

2. Identify appropriate staff.

Once you are in the member's profile, find the office phone number and call the office (Washington, DC or local district office) to identify the specific staff that handles health issues (usually a Health Legislative Assistant). Congressional staffers are listed in the profile but their specific issue areas are not identified. It is common to meet with Congressional staff. Don't be discouraged if you are not able to meet with the member of Congress directly. Congressional staffs are often the experts on the issues and provide direction to their boss about how to vote on their issue area.

If you are trying to meet with the member of Congress, first contact the executive assistant or scheduler. It is suggested that you place an initial phone call to the scheduler and ask for a meeting. You may be required to fax in your request or send an e-mail so that they have your request on record.

3. Contact the staff.

The best way to contact staff, unless directed otherwise by the office, is to call and follow up with an e-mail. Congressional staff are very busy, and it may take a week or longer to get a meeting finalized.

The first step in contacting the legislator's office is to ask to speak directly with the staff member that you've identified. The telephone number for the Washington, D.C. office is included in the profile. You can also call the Capitol Switchboard at 202-225-3121 and ask for your member's office. (See congressional appointment request fax form).

E-mail is also a very effective way to get a response from Congressional staff. The House and Senate use two different e-mail formats for their employees. Sometimes the use of e-mail varies among offices, and you may need to rely solely on telephone contact.

Typical House staff e-mail addresses:

firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov

Example: Joe Smith joe.smith@mail.house.gov

Typical Senate staff e-mail address:

firstname_lastname@membersname.senate.gov.

Example: Joe Smith with Senator Jones

joe_smith@jones.senate.gov

4. What do I say?

When you contact the office, make sure to highlight the relationship that you have with the member's district. (Use all your connections—work residence, home residence, places you once lived, school residence, etc.) Tell them the subject or purpose of your proposed visit and when you would like to meet.

Example:

“Hello, my name is Jane Smith and I’m an occupational therapist from *(insert city/state)* I will be in Washington, D.C. on *(insert date)* and would like to come by and talk to the Congressman/woman or his/her health care/education/research staffer about some issues important to occupational therapy professionals and the people we serve.”

5. Follow up

Staffs on Capitol Hill are extremely busy. After you make a phone call (usually you will have to leave a voicemail) and send an e-mail, you might have to follow up with a call and/or e-mail in 2-3 days. Do not be a pest but persistence will pay off.

Other Tips:

- Remember that the **AOTA staff will schedule all Senate appointments and will make every effort to schedule these Senate appointments prior to 1:00pm.** There are 3 different Senate buildings and you should allow about 15 minutes between meetings (on the Senate side).
- When you are traveling between the Senate and House you should allow anywhere from 20 – 30 minutes to get from one side to the other. Meetings on the House side should be scheduled **no earlier than 1:00 pm.** However, if the staff or member of Congress has limited openings you should plan accordingly
- The Capitol Visitor Center (location of briefing) is located right in the middle of the Capitol and you can expect a 15 minute walk to the House or Senate offices.
- For House appointments, allow yourself about 15 minutes between meetings. There are 3 different House buildings and this will allow enough time to comfortably get from one meeting to the next.
- A typical meeting can last anywhere from 10 minutes to 30 minutes.

In making your appointments remember that this is a very busy time of year on Capitol Hill. You may not receive a call back immediately. If you do not hear back within the week give them another call or email. Also, it does happen that a meeting will be scheduled and confirmed but a change could occur. If this happens, do not be disheartened. Capitol Hill staff is typically pretty flexible.

Feel free to contact Federal Affairs staff at fad@aota.org or hillday@aota.org or 1-800-SAY-AOTA or 301-652-2682 with any questions.

Updated 9/4/12