



How to Engage Members of Congress to Help Protect the Lifeline

The Arc knows that Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicare, Social Security, and civil rights laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act are a lifeline for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families. These federal programs provide the key to community living and inclusion for people with I/DD across the United States. Any cuts to these lifelines would be devastating.

Members of Congress base their votes on their own experiences, interactions, and beliefs. Hearing directly from their constituents can make all the difference.

Here are some simple ways that you can help protect the lifeline. Your efforts can make all the difference!

Connect with Your Chapter(s) of The Arc

[The Arc has more than 650 chapters](#) in 48 states and the District of Columbia. Are you a member of or a volunteer with a chapter? If not, why not? Reach out to your local and state chapters to find out what activities they have planned to engage with your Members of Congress. If you do not have a chapter of The Arc in your area, consider connecting with other families, service providers, individuals with I/DD, or allies to engage in some of the ways outlined below.

Participate in [The Arc's Disability Advocacy Network](#)

The Arc has a big network of advocates across the country that stay informed and engaged on the issues by signing up on our website. When a vote is happening fast, or an issue is heating up in Congress, the people on this list are called upon to make a call or send an email to their Member of Congress. You will also receive important updates on what is happening in Congress and federal agencies that impacts people with I/DD.

These alerts ask you to make a phone call, send an email, sign a petition, or tweet at a legislator - it's a quick and simple way to support the I/DD movement and this contact does influence Members of Congress - you are their constituents, and they represent you in Washington. The alerts include brief background information and talking points to help guide your communication so that you are prepared.

Recruit Friends and Family to Join the Movement

We are only as strong as the volume of support we can generate on any given issue. And given the hard road ahead to save critical programs, we need all the help we can get. What's unique about the I/DD community is that almost everyone's life is touched by someone with I/DD, or someone related to a person with I/DD, or by a direct support professional, or a teacher who helps to educate a child with I/DD. It's those people, joining forces with people with I/DD and their parents, caregivers, siblings, and other loved ones, who will help us show our strength.

So recruit people to join you and The Arc!

- Put a personal plea on your social media channels. Ask your network to sign up for [The Arc's Disability Advocacy Network](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), sign a petition, or read about our issues from our blog or website.
- Email your family and friends when there is a critical vote coming up, and ask them to take action. They may not want to sign up for another email list - but if the ask is coming from you, their friend, they may pick up the phone or send an email to help sway their elected officials.

Attend a Public Event Hosted By Your Member of Congress

When Members of Congress are back home in their districts, they often hold town hall meetings, office hours at grocery stores or libraries, or attend large community events so that they can hear from their constituents.

But not all of these opportunities are widely publicized. So reach out to your Member's in-state office to find out when you might catch them in person, and follow them on Facebook and Twitter in case they posts updates on events. Go to [The Arc's Disability Advocacy Network](#) and enter your zip code in the "Find Your Elected Officials" box to go to a page that lists your federal elected officials. From there, you can click to get the contact information for their offices.

These don't have to be formal meetings - some of the most memorable and influential interactions a Member of Congress can have are when they are out in the community and, by chance, encounter someone with a disability. Here's an example:

[A Chance Encounter Leads to a New Focus For Sen. Murphy](#)

Before you go, check [The Arc's public policy page](#) for the most up-to-date information about the latest threats, and to get Fact Sheets and related materials. Check out [The Arc's Disability Advocacy Network action page](#) for the latest action alerts.

At these opportunities, ask a question. A good question will highlight why Medicaid, the ACA, and/or SSI are a lifeline to the person and important to the state or Congressional district, and will ask the Senator or Representative what they are doing to protect these programs. A good question is also short, to-the-point, and respectful.

Share your personal story or connection to I/DD; bring copies of the Fact Sheets provided in this toolkit to leave with the Member and their staff; and thank them for their time - even if you don't agree in this encounter, you may be able to win them over on another issue important to people with disabilities.

Ask for a Meeting with Your Member

Many chapters of The Arc arrange meetings with Members of Congress so that they can learn about the services and supports the chapter provides in the community, and include people with I/DD, support professionals, family members, and others in those meetings. You should reach out to your chapter to find out if they have any meetings planned that you could join.

Or you can arrange for a personal meeting with your Member. The Member's time is tightly scheduled and so the other methods outlined above may be faster to accomplish - but Members are looking to connect with their constituents, and meetings provide a block of time dedicated to your issues and concerns.

How to Set Up Meetings with Your Members of Congress

First, find out who your Congressional Members are. You can find out who your Senators are here:

http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm. You can find out who your Representative is here:

<http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>

Second, check [The Arc's public policy page](#) for the most up-to-date information about the latest threats, and to get Fact Sheets and related materials. Check out [The Arc's Disability Advocacy Network action page](#) for the latest action alerts.

Coordinate with your state chapter or local chapter to see if something is already being planned or to join forces.

If not, decide if you want someone to go with you for the meeting. For example, staff or board leadership from your state or local chapter of The Arc or more experienced advocates if you are new to this could help you deliver your message.

Schedule the Appointment

Every Member of Congress has at least one person on staff responsible for managing their schedule. Call their in-state office and ask to speak with the scheduler. Explain that you want to share information about the importance of Medicaid, the ACA, SSI, or other lifeline programs to community living for people with I/DD. Base your message on information on The Arc's public policy web page about latest threats. If the scheduler has questions you don't have answers to, follow up quickly to supply those answers.

Remember to Be Flexible

Members of Congress maximize their time in their state and so they may only have a half hour available when you would prefer an hour meeting, or they may want to meet on a weekend, or in a geographically inconvenient location. Be as flexible as you can be because their time is limited, and you don't want to miss your opportunity to make the connection.

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