



## Contacting Your Legislators

Advocacy is all about developing a relationship with your legislators. In order to do that you need to connect with them.

### There are many reasons to contact your legislators

- Make a quick phone call to state your side of an issue
- Send a quick email to inform them of a pressing issue
- Arrange a meeting
- Invite them to attend an event you may be having

### Have a clear understanding of the purpose of your contact

- Conquering CHD action alerts should clearly outline why and how to contact your legislator
- If you have any questions about the issue, or would like us to provide you with a sample script or text, please email [advocacy@conqueringchd.org](mailto:advocacy@conqueringchd.org) for assistance
- Legislative staff members are very busy, please respect this by being brief and to the point

### Build a relationship with the Health LA

As in any office, there are many layers of staff that surround the lawmaker, and it is unlikely that you will have direct contact with him/her. In order to be most effective, we suggest that you try to direct all communication through the staff in charge of health issues or the Health Legislative Assistant (Health LA). He or she may direct you to other people such as the scheduler, as necessary. Building a strong relationship with the Health LA is key as he or she often has a health background, understands our issues and has the direct ear of the lawmaker.

### Finding the Health LA:

- 1) Find your legislator's website:
  - House.gov for your Representative
  - Senate.gov for your Senators
- 2) Locate the Washington D.C. office telephone number
  - Call the number and ask for the name of the person who handles health issues. Ask them to spell it twice. Then ask for this person's email address, as well. If they do not provide it, contact [advocacy@conqueringchd.org](mailto:advocacy@conqueringchd.org) and we'll help.
  - Save the general office number in your contacts. You will use this number when you need to make a quick call in support of an issue.
- 3) Send a quick email to the Health LA
  - State your name, and city to identify that you are a constituent.
  - Inform him or her that you are an advocate for congenital heart disease related issues and that you will contact him/her periodically to bring awareness to current policy. Attach a picture of your kiddo and in 1-2 sentences a little bit about you or your child.

### I did it!

If you successfully connect with your legislator or their office, let us know you made contact by emailing [advocacy@conqueringchd.org](mailto:advocacy@conqueringchd.org).



### **Different types of communication:**

**Email** – this is the quickest and one of the most effective ways to reach your legislators

- If time is short and this is your first time reaching out, use the contact form on the legislator’s website to send your email.
- If you have identified the Health LA, or had a previous contact with your member or a member of their staff, please feel free to use the direct email address you were given.

### **Phone-**

- Find the phone number for the Washington D.C. office, on the legislator’s website.
- You may simply leave a message with the staff who answers the phone. Usually, this results in a tally of your position on an issue.
- You may also ask to speak with the person who handles health issues. You will likely be asked to leave him/her a message on their voice mail. If this is the case, request the health staff’s email address and send an email, as well.

### **Standard Mail –**

- Security regulations can significantly delay delivery of paper mail to legislative offices. This method of communication is used primarily to send a photo or hand written message, but be aware that it is not timely.

### **In-Person visit**

- An In-Person visit is the ideal way to connect with your lawmaker and build a personal connection.
- Please see our tips for a successful visit for more detailed information about a visit.
- In-district Offices – Legislators have offices throughout their home state. Visit their website to find the office nearest you. It is preferable to call the office and schedule an appointment, but if you happen to be in the area, feel free to drop in.
- In Washington D.C. – If this interests you, we strongly recommend you participate in Congenital Heart Legislative Conference and Hill Visits. If you happen to be in D.C for other reasons, you may schedule a visit with your legislator’s office by phone or email to set up an appointment. There is often a visit form on the webpage.

### **Social Media**

- Like, friend and follow your legislators on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn
- Engage with your lawmakers with comments, retweets and tags, however, please keep comments positive, brief and stick to the issue of congenital heart disease.
- If you meet with your legislator or staff, be sure to get a picture and post-it!

### **Town Hall Meetings**

- Whether virtual or in-person, most legislators host town Hall Meetings throughout the year. This is an opportunity for them to interact with constituents.
- Call the Washington D.C. office for a list of scheduled meetings.
- Consider arriving early for an opportunity to introduce yourself to staff, or the member.



## Conquering CHD

- Prepare a question in advance that will direct your lawmaker's attention to CHD. For example – "My child (or I) was born with the most common birth defect. What is your view of federal funding for research to improve the lives of those living with heart defects?" Be prepared that your lawmaker may not have an answer for you on the spot, but hopefully, this will open the door for further communication.
- Often times, Town Hall Meetings can become very emotionally charged. Please do not engage in any negative behavior.

### **Public Events**

- Occasionally, lawmakers participate in large public events including ribbon cuttings, bill signings or fundraisers.
- While it may be difficult to get the attention of your legislator, it is still an opportunity to try to connect.
- If you are holding a large CHD related event such as a walk or awareness party, consider inviting your legislator to attend. Visit their website for more information about how to invite them to attend an event.

### **Traditional Media**

- This is still a great way to get the attention of lawmakers. On a regular basis, they are updated on all media relations mentioning them.
- Keep it positive, brief and sticking to the matters at hand.
- We are happy to provide templates and guidance. Contact [advocacy@conqueringchd.org](mailto:advocacy@conqueringchd.org) for more info.
- Letter to the Editor – a letter can be created directly addressing the lawmaker and have a call to action.
- Op-Ed – this is a great way to get information about CHD into the community and highlight any work a lawmaker has already done. It helps to write this in conjunction with a medical professional who can provide technical expertise.