

Terms to Know

Recess – A time period when Members of Congress are in their home districts rather than in Washington D.C.—also called a “state work period.” A recess period can be a few days or a few weeks, and there are multiple recesses every year. This is when Members of Congress typically meet with constituents, attending community events and meetings, and holding events where they invite members of the media. For Members of Congress, a constituent is anyone who lives in their state if they are a Senator, and anyone who lives in their district if they are a Representative.

If you live in a state, you have one Representative in the House of Representatives who represents the district (area) in which you live and two Senators who each represent the entire state. If you live in a territory or the District of Columbia, you have one Delegate to the House and no Senators. These are your Members of Congress.

Members of Congress – Elected Senators and Representatives who represent the people in their state or district. In the U.S. Congress, there are 100 Senators in the Senate and 435 Representatives in the House. [Find your Senators or Representative.](#)

Why is Recess Important?

A Congressional Recess is a valuable opportunity for you to meet with your Members of Congress when they are in your community. You can show your Member of Congress the results of a federal investment, or an issue or project in the community that you believe needs support from the federal government. Recess provides constituents with a great opportunity to show their Members of Congress what is happening on the ground in their state or district, and our stories and personal experiences can have a real impact on Members of Congress!

Meet in D.C. vs. Home Offices

What’s the difference between meeting Members of Congress in D.C. versus their District (home) office? A meeting in D.C., will often be a meeting with staff, but the recess is a possible chance to meet directly with the Member of Congress at their home office or at events. Meetings during recess are just as important as a meeting in D.C., and it can be a helpful way to connect with a Member of Congress without having to travel all the way to Washington, D.C.

Make a Difference During Recess

- **Learn about your Members of Congress:** Learning about the issues your Congressperson is working to address can help personalize your messaging. Find out who your Members of Congress are and what issues they are currently working to address. To learn more, [click here.](#)
- **Schedule a meeting:** Use this [AUCD guide on meeting with Members of Congress.](#) Practice what you are going to say. Keep it short and to-the-point.
 - If you get to meet with a Member of Congress, thank them on social media and tag AUCDnetwork on Facebook or AUCDpix on Instagram.

- **Attend an event with a Member of Congress:** Members of Congress may host town hall meetings or other public events when they are in their home district. Public events can be a great time to share your concerns or directly ask them questions.
- **Invite a Member of Congress to your Center or Program:** Visits to your Center or Program can be a powerful opportunity to showcase the important work being done to support people with disabilities in your district or state.
- **Invite them to speak at an upcoming event:** Speaking at an event could be a valuable opportunity for your Member of Congress to demonstrate their support for the disability community.

Sample Timeline to Contact Congress

- **At least 2-3 weeks before Congressional recess:** Identify your Members of Congress and research their legislative stances. Reach out to their local office via their website, email, or phone to request a meeting or site visit.
 - Keep it brief. Share who you are, what your Center or Program does, and why you want to meet.
 - To learn more about contacting your Member of Congress, use this [AUCD guide on Connecting with Congress](#).
- **1-2 weeks before Congressional recess:** Confirm the plans for your meeting, visit, or event. Once the event is confirmed, create and finalize an agenda for the visit or meeting. Decide on what materials—such as a one pager on your Center—you want to provide to the Member and their staff.
 - If you have not received a response, make a follow-up email or phone call.
- **During recess:** Host the visit or meeting with the Member of Congress.
 - If you are given permission, take photos and document parts of the conversation or event.
- **Within 1 week after meeting your Member of Congress:** Send a thank you note to their office, reiterating the key messages from your conversation. Along with the thank you note, you should send any follow-up information you want them to have or that they asked for, including information you forgot to mention during the visit or answers to questions they had during the visit.

What You Should Discuss

- Discuss funding for disability programs, specifically for AUCD's Network Centers and Programs. Tell the Member or their staff how your Center or Program uses federal funding to improve the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in your state/district.
 - These conversations are especially valuable when the federal budget for the upcoming Fiscal Year is under discussion and debate.

- Explain the specific services and supports your Center or Program provides. Describe how these resources make a measurable difference in the lives of people with disabilities and their families.
- Emphasize the history of strong, bipartisan support in Congress for the Developmental Disabilities Network and the services it provides.
- Highlight disability-related bills that have been introduced in the last few weeks. Read [Disability Policy News](#) here to learn more about recent legislative activity and other policy affecting people with disabilities.

Things to Remember

- Your Member of Congress has limited time. When scheduling a meeting or a site visit to your Center or Program, you should specifically discuss how much time they have—you will likely have this conversation with the Member's scheduler or another person on their staff. Choose carefully what you feel is most important to show your Senator or Representative and what is most important to discuss with them.
- AUCD Network Centers and Programs are federally funded. This means that you cannot lobby when you are talking to policymakers – only educate them. Lobbying is when you ask an elected official or their staff to take a particular action, like asking them to vote yes or no on a specific bill. Instead, you can educate them on the impacts of a bill, or on the importance of increased funding for programs. Read this factsheet [for more information on educating vs lobbying](#).