

What is Congress?

The United States Congress is the federal law-making body of the United States. The main job of Congress is to make laws that affect our daily lives, regardless of where we live in the United States. Congress is made up of two parts, the Senate and the House of Representatives. Senators and Representatives are both elected by the voters of their state or territory. They are known collectively as Members of Congress. There are 100 Senators in Congress—two for each state. There are 435 Representatives in Congress. The bigger the state, the more Representatives that state has in Congress.

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.

- Not sure of your Congressional district or who your House Representative is? Use this website to search by your ZIP code:
<https://www.house.gov/representatives>
- Not sure who your Senators are? Use this website to search by your state:
<https://www.senate.gov/senators/index.htm>



You can use [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) to search for your Representative and Senators and see what committees they are on in Congress. A committee is a group of lawmakers who review bills and make changes to bills—which are called amendments—before bills are voted on by all of the Senators or Representatives. Visiting your Member of Congress' website will tell you what committees they serve on and the latest news from their office. *Tip: Each Member of Congress has a newsletter you can sign up for to learn about their work and priorities.*

You can also use [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) to learn about your Representative's and Senators' bill history by searching for their name. This tells you what bills they sponsored or introduced and cosponsored or supported. Knowing this will help you talk to your Member of Congress or your Member's staff when you call, email, or meet with them about disability issues. *Tip: If you create a free account and follow your Representative and Senators on [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov), you will get updates each time they sponsor a bill.*

Why and How to Contact Congress

You should contact Congress because...

You have knowledge that Members of Congress could benefit from learning.

You vote and can hold Members of Congress accountable by voting in elections.

Your daily life will be impacted by decisions made by Members of Congress.

If you do not educate Members of Congress, someone else will do for you.

Connecting with Congress Primer



Anyone can contact Congress. Contacting Congress is open to all people (individuals, organizations, agencies, business owners, providers, stakeholders, etc.) who are interested in the federal laws that impact their daily lives. Members of Congress listen to people that live in their state or district because they represent those people—called constituents—and those people have the power to vote for them or against them in elections.

Here are a few steps for contacting Congress:

Locate the information you need depending on the method of contact you choose.

- Log onto usa.gov/elected-officials. This page links you to federal, state, and local elected officials.
- Enter the requested information (state, zip code, etc.).
- Click on the plus sign next to the type of official you want to contact (federal, state, local).
- Locate the information associated with the person you want to contact.

Call

After locating your Senators and Representative, their phone number is listed either under or beside their name. Dial their number, state your name and where you live, and explain why you are calling.



Email

After locating your Senators and Representative, you can typically find an email address or contact page on your Member of Congress' website. This will reach them quickly, but you may not receive a response quickly.

Social Media

Many Members of Congress have social media accounts. You can tag them in any post that you feel would be important for them to see. Keep in mind that there is no guarantee that your Senators or Representative will see your post on social media.

Meeting In Person

Another way to connect with your Members of Congress is to request a visit. Invite them to town meetings, advocacy events, or other community activities. A large group of people assembling around the same concern has the best chance of making the greatest impact. Are you having an

What should I say on the phone or in an email?

Keep it brief!

If you are calling, it may help to write down what you want to say before you call. If you need ideas, you can use [this elevator pitch script](#). **Remember that your role is to educate your Member of Congress or their staff about why an issue is important to you; you should not ask them for anything (support, votes, a commitment) in return, as that is considered lobbying.** [Read more about educating versus lobbying here.](#)

Note: Both Senators and Representatives have voicemail inboxes so you can leave a message if you want to call after hours.

It takes many weeks for mail to reach the U.S. Capitol, so it is best to call or email. Calls are the most effective for immediate issues.

event or important meeting in your community? Invite your Members of Congress or their staff to come.

You can set up a meeting with your Member of Congress or their staff in their D.C. office on Capitol Hill. If you cannot come to D.C., Members of Congress have offices in their districts in their state where you can meet. You can also set up a virtual meeting using Zoom or another web-based video conferencing service—the type of video call you use may vary depending on the Member of Congress and what their office typically uses.

If you will be representing your UCEDD, LEND, or IDDRC as a trainee or employee and/or are traveling on federal funds, **you cannot lobby. You can only educate your Members of Congress.** [Learn more here.](#) Also, remember that you have to follow your university rules on reaching out to offices.

Check with your Program director/faculty mentor/training director on how to handle scheduling the Hill visit. Be sure to clarify whether you are responsible for scheduling the visit or if someone will schedule the appointment(s) for you.

To make an appointment, look up your Member of Congress' contact information on their website or call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be connected to the office. Ask to speak to a scheduler and then ask to make an appointment with the Member of Congress or with the legislative assistant (LA) who handles a particular issue (e.g. disability, health, education, employment).



Meeting with the staff of a Member of Congress is equally as important as meeting with the Member themselves. These are the experts on a topic—they advise the Member of Congress on whether they should support or vote for a bill, write or sign onto a letter, conduct oversight actions, and more. Get the name of the legislative assistant that works on that issue during your call. When you are scheduling the meeting, it is common to be asked for the names of the people in your group who will be in the meeting and in which town or city those people live. Be prepared to provide that information to the scheduler.

Another Option

Many Members host coffee gatherings or other events with their constituents when they are in their home state, especially during a recess. This is a great way to meet with your member in your local community.

If possible, you could attend your Member of Congress' constituent breakfast. These events are an easy way to meet your Member of Congress in a less formal setting. They will try to speak to everyone and want to know what school/ state/ town you represent. You do not need to conduct your full visit at the breakfast. You can still schedule another meeting. If your Member of Congress is hosting a constituent breakfast, you can find information on the day, time, and location on their website.