“Take Your Congressman to Work Day” – How to Engage Your Member of Congress

Initial Contact

- Contacting your member is easy. Just go to their online website and find the phone number to the district office that is closest to you.
- Call the office and ask for the scheduling secretary, you can ask to schedule a meeting over the phone or ask for an e-mail address and request a meeting that way.

Making the “Ask”

- When requesting a meeting via e-mail remember to be pithy and to the point; members and staff read thousands of e-mails and receive hundreds of requests so you want to make sure and entice them with to-the-point messaging.
- Always make your messaging relevant to the district – If there’s one thing members like, it’s serving their constituents and fixing problems in the district.
- Strength in numbers → If at all possible try and schedule a meeting/visit with a group of registered dietitians, or if you invite the member to your place of work try and have more than one RD present. Having more than one RD provides emphasis to the meeting and importance to the issues you’re advocating for.

Time to Meet

- *What to bring to the meeting*
  - You want to bring your leave-behind material for when the meeting/visit is finished.
  - Don’t hesitate to bring along your talking points so you can point out relevant statistics or data points on issues. And bring along any additional information you may feel is relevant.
  - Your positive attitude and passion for what you do. That’s what you want the member to see.
- *What to say in the meeting*
  - Familiarize yourself with the talking points on the various issues and always relate those issues back to you and what you do.
  - Have a personal and or professional story ready to tell, preferably one that relates to one of the specific pieces of legislation. Personal stories from the workplace always resonate more deeply than facts or figures. These members care about the people they represent and so by telling a story about one of their constituents (your patients/clients) you will be able to make a stronger connection from the member’s understanding of the issue to the actual policy.
  - Always share your story **first** and then follow it with the relevant facts and figures.
  - Do not be afraid to say “I don’t know”. Nothing is worse than providing false information to a member/staffer. Remember you want to be viewed as a reliable source. Simply say “I’m not quite sure about that, but I can get you the answer later.”

Follow-up contact

- Always follow up 1 to 2 days later with a thank-you email to the scheduler; or member (if you have his/her e-mail address).
- Reiterate your messaging on the things that were discussed in the meeting/visit.
- Make sure to state that you will be reaching out the member’s relevant staffer to answer any question that the member may have had or to provide any supporting materials that were requested.