



SAFE STATES

# Meeting with Your Congressional Delegation at Home

2018 Guide

## INTRODUCTION

Policy making and advocacy are an imperative component of advancing injury and violence prevention. Safe States works to build relationships with Congressional and administration staff and serves as an advocate to represent Safe States Alliance's policy priorities and influence federal action that affects injury and violence prevention efforts.

As experts in the field of injury and violence prevention, and stewards of state and federal resources, Safe States Alliance members add a powerful and critical voice to policymaking. Injury and violence prevention professionals need to be more transparent with and accountable to both elected officials and the public about what they do every day—largely behind the scenes—to protect and promote the health, safety, and well-being of all Americans. As stewards of taxpayer dollars, injury and violence prevention professionals should communicate to policymakers how health departments are working 24/7 on their behalf. Part of effective policy communication is helping elected officials and the public understand how states use taxpayer dollars to improve public health and, conversely, what states cannot do with depleted funding.

Congressional recesses represent an important opportunity for you and other injury and violence prevention practitioners to meet with members to share information about the burden of injuries and violence within their districts and the prevention activities that are going on in your state. When Congressional members spend time in the district, you may wish to:

- Invite a member to see a program in action or speak at an upcoming event;
- Attend a town hall meeting;
- Request an in-district meeting; and/or
- Work with the local media to raise the visibility of injury and violence topics and prevention programs in action.

This guide is intended help you understand the process and provide tools and ideas to help to communicate effectively with federal policymakers. As you do so, we also encourage you to learn about your agency or organization's policies and follow the rules as expressed by your state's ethics office. This toolkit includes language and information used with permission from the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.

Please contact Safe States' Director of Government Relations ([governmentrelations@safestates.org](mailto:governmentrelations@safestates.org)) if you have any questions or would like additional information.

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## POLICY COMMUNICATION CONTINUUM: LOBBYING, ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION

The Safe States Alliance understands that many government employees have restrictions on the types of activities in which they may participate. The IRS defines advocacy as “the promotion of an idea that is directed at changing a policy position or program at an institution.” ***Safe States encourages you to investigate your agency or organization’s policies and grant requirements regarding lobbying, advocacy and educational efforts and follow these rules.*** At minimum, all injury and violence prevention professionals can and should educate elected officials in the interest of improved transparency and accountability.



Providing information, education, research, and analysis. Does not include value judgements or legislative action.

**Example:** “In our state, the opioid epidemic is causing thousands of deaths per week.”



Communicating with policymakers and the general public about specific issues without taking a position. This conveys a value without taking a position.

**Example:** “State health departments are helping address the opioid epidemic through [XX] interventions.”



Conducting activities in support or opposition of legislation or regulations.

**Example:** “We are asking you to support [XX] bill that would increase funding for public health programs.”

## FINDING YOUR CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES




Members spend time in their home district throughout the year including an extended period of time each summer during the “August Recess.” For more information about their schedules, visit the [House Calendar](#) and the [Senate Calendar](#).

Find your representatives in the [House](#) by entering your zip code.

Find your representatives in the [Senate](#) searching by state or by name.

## SAFE STATES ALLIANCE’S POLICY AGENDA LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Each year, the Safe States Alliance Policy Committee and Executive Committee work to identify and prioritize key federal policy issues. Position statements and additional background materials for Safe States’ legislative priorities can be found [here](#) on the Safe States Alliance website.

**SAFE STATES**  
2017 Policy Agenda

Injuries and violence are critical public health threats facing the United States today. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in the first half of 2016, more Americans die from violence and injuries — such as motor vehicle crashes, falls, suicides, or homicides — than from any other cause, including cancer, HIV, or the flu. Yet injuries and violence are predictable and preventable.

The Safe States Alliance calls on the federal government to prioritize injury and violence prevention to save American lives and money by expanding and strengthening state prevention capacity, unintentional injury prevention and violence prevention efforts in 2017.

**Expand and Strengthen State Prevention Capacity**

- Provide \$20 million to CDC’s National Center for Injury Control and Prevention to ensure all states, territories and the District of Columbia have basic program funding the Safe State Violence and Injury Prevention Program ([Safe States](#)) for coordinated and comprehensive injury and violence prevention programs.
- Allocate \$24 million to CDC for the [Injury Control Research Centers](#) to conduct interdisciplinary research and provide training for future injury and violence prevention practitioners and researchers.
- Increase funding for the CDC’s [Preventive Health and Health Services \(PHHS\) Block Grant](#) of \$300 million to provide flexible support for state-specific public health priorities.
- Preserve funding allocated through the [Prevention and Public Health Fund](#) and ensure that sufficient resources exist to support injury and violence prevention efforts.
- Provide \$40 million to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) for the [Maternal and Child Health \(MCH\) Block Grant](#), including injury prevention-specific efforts and performance measures.
- Provide \$30M to HRSA for the [Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visitation Program](#).

**Prevent Unintentional Injuries**

**Motor Vehicle-Related Injuries and Deaths**

- Provide \$21.5 million for CDC to collect and analyze health- and crash-related data, employ evidence-based strategies to increase occupant protection, reduce impaired and distracted driving, support teen driving/ graduated driver licensing, and provide state/tribal-specific technical assistance to identify and evaluate interventions.
- Allocate \$1.2 billion for the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) to support important programs for improving vehicle safety, behavioral safety (e.g., distracted driving), state grants for high visibility enforcement and autonomous vehicles.

**Older Adult Falls**

- Provide \$17 million to the CDC’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control to expand clinical fall prevention, such as the [Prevent Falls! Accidents, Deaths, and Injuries \(PFADI\)](#) program, provide training to health care professionals, increase surveillance, and educate the general public.
- Provide \$5 million for [Administration for Community Living \(ACL\)](#) for state and community-level implementation of [effective fall interventions](#).

**Prescription Drug Misuse and Overdose**

- Provide \$15 million to CDC to expand the Prescription Behavior Surveillance System, fund research, provide training, and assure all states, territories and the District of Columbia can coordinate efforts to reduce prescription drug overdoses through surveillance (including partner identifying, implementing and evaluating prevention strategies) and working with clinical providers to reduce prescription drug overdose through [toolkits for states](#) and the [CDC’s Injury Prevention Institute](#).

## INVITE MEMBERS TO SEE PROGRAMS IN ACTION AND SPEAK DURING EVENTS

This is an opportunity to showcase the importance of your work and the benefits it brings to community members. A site visit provides a Member with firsthand experience of seeing a program in action and this will leave a lasting impression. You may wish to ask a Member to speak at an upcoming statewide conference, coalition meeting or to view an injury and violence prevention program in action.

### *How to Request a Visit*

1. Call your Member's district office - request to speak with the appointments secretary or scheduler. Identify yourself - who you are (a constituent), who you work for, the purpose of your call (to request a site visit).
2. Following your request, ask about office procedures for scheduling a member visit. Be prepared to discuss the specifics of what you are inviting the member to do, how many people will be in attendance and where the visit would take place. We recommend reaching out two to three weeks in advance as Members' calendars fill up quickly. Consider offering several times that would work to see a program in action or attend a meeting. If needed, submit a written request and follow up by phone or email within a day or two to confirm.

### SAMPLE LETTER OF INVITATION

The Honorable [Insert First and Last Name]  
United States [Senate or House of Representatives]  
[Insert office number] House or Senate Office Building  
Washington DC, [20510 Senate or 20515 House]

Dear [Senator or Representative Name]:

I would like to invite you to visit the [Organization Name/program name] on [date] to learn about the burden of injuries and violence in [state or district] and prevention programs in place to address this critical public health issue. During your visit, you will [insert information about what will be covered, who they may meet, what they would see, who else would be there]. If you have questions about specific injury and violence issues, please let us know and we will be happy to address them.

We look forward to your visit. If you have any questions about the trip, please do not hesitate to contact [insert contact information].

Sincerely  
[Name, Title, Organization]

### *Preparing for the Visit*

- Work with Member's staff to coordinate details of the visit including the time and location, as well as lining up local media if at all possible.

- Determine what your goals are and the best use of your time with the Member or their staff. You will likely have approximately 10-15 minutes, so pick one to two issues to highlight. Describe how injuries and violence impact the state/district and highlight prevention strategies that have/are making a difference.
- If you go with a group, pick a primary spokesperson and make sure everyone is on the same page on key talking points.
- Have succinct written materials - one pagers, fact sheets, brochures - ready to hand out as well as business cards. One pagers on the Safe States Alliance legislative priorities can be found [here](#).
- Involve local media if possible.

#### *After the Visit*

- Send a thank you note to the Member and the staffers for the visit.
- Continue to keep in contact by sharing new reports and other information that may be helpful.
- Let Safe States Alliance know about your meeting and any planned next steps by calling 770-690-9000 or emailing [governmentrelations@safestates.org](mailto:governmentrelations@safestates.org).



## ATTEND A SCHEDULED TOWN HALL EVENT

During Congressional recess, Congress and Senate Members often hold in-district events referred to as town hall meetings that are open to the public. These meetings are important forums for Members to learn about constituent issues. Additionally, reporters often attend these events, providing an opportunity to bring attention to injury and violence issues raised during the meeting.

### *How to Find Out When Town Hall Events are Scheduled*

Members often publicize town hall events and other local appearances in a number of ways - press releases, newsletters, newspaper, social media, and making details available on their website. Additionally you can always call their district office for information and upcoming events. Sign-up for the alert lists to receive Members' newsletters, press releases and other notices, and consider following the Member on Twitter if they have an account.

### SAMPLE QUESTION

"Good afternoon. Thank you for holding this important forum, I appreciate the opportunity to speak. My name is [First and Last Name]; I live in [Name of City/Town within the Member's district] and work at the [Organization Name] I am here today as a public health professional concerned about the injuries and violence in this community. [insert question]?"

### *Preparing to Attend the Town Hall Event*

- Learn more about the event and if there is a specific theme for the event.
- Arrive early and sign in. Indicate that you have a question if there is a space for that on the sign-in sheet.
- Come prepared - have a specific and concise question in mind and practice your question in advance.
- Do your homework on the Member of Congress. Make sure you know a little about the policymaker before you attend the meeting (such as their bio, voting record, positions and how they may be related to public health/injury and violence prevention priorities). If the Member has done something positive for the IVP community, begin by thanking the Member for that action.
- If called on, express your appreciation, identify yourself (share your professional role/organization if you have permission from your agency) and ask your question.
- Encourage other injury and violence prevention professionals to attend, as well.
- If you are not able to ask your question during the event, you may be able to introduce yourself and ask your question before the Member leaves the event.



*After the Town Hall Event*

- Send a follow-up email to the Member, and share additional information about your programs/IVP issues in your state/district, if appropriate.
- Consider following up with staff periodically by e-mail to share local news of the work your organization is doing, particularly with federal support.
- Let Safe States Alliance know about your attendance and any planned next steps by calling 770-690-9000 or emailing [governmentrelations@safestates.org](mailto:governmentrelations@safestates.org).

## REQUEST AN IN-DISTRICT MEETING

### *How to Request a Meeting*

- Call your Member's district office.
- Identify yourself as a constituent and be prepared to share the purpose of your call (to request a meeting with the Member or staffer) and others who would be in attendance.
- Send a follow up email to confirm meeting specifics.
- If you do not receive a response immediately, that is normal. However, you should follow up with the scheduler if you have not received a response within two weeks.

### SAMPLE EMAIL REQUEST

Dear Senator/Representative (INSERT NAME),

I would like to request a meeting with you during the upcoming August district work period at your district office. I am available during the following (INSERT DATES and TIMES). The purpose of this visit is to discuss with you our community's unique injury and violence prevention challenges, including (INSERT SOME OF THE CHALLENGES IN YOUR STATE), and how our agency uses federal and state resources to improve the public's health.

Please let me know by (DATE) if you will be able to attend. You can contact me at (INSERT YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS AND CELL PHONE NUMBER).

Sincerely,  
(INSERT YOUR NAME)

### *Meeting Preparation Tips*

- **DO** come prepared - know what issue(s) you are going to talk about prior to the meeting. You will likely only have 10-15 minutes, so be prepared and plan to talk succinctly about one or two key issues. Prepare talking points such as:
  - Burden of injury in the state/district - provide personal stories if at all possible.
  - Specific examples, key successes/programs in action - highlighting federal programs in your state (NVDRS, RPE, Core VIPP, PFS, DDPI, etc).
  - Role/importance of prevention programs.
- **DO** your homework on the Member of Congress. Make sure you know a little about the policymaker before you attend the meeting (such as their bio, voting record, positions and how they may relate to public health priorities).

- **DO** bring some written materials - one pagers, fact sheets, brochures - to leave behind.
- **DO** arrive to the meeting 5 minutes early.
- **DO** realize the importance of meeting with staff members - these are people who present the information to the Congress member and are a very valuable resource.
- **DO** identify yourself and make a connection with the district at the start of the meeting.
- **DO** pick a primary spokesperson if you go with a group and make sure everyone is on the same page on key talking points. A group or a coalition of like-minded partners can demonstrate the support for an issue within the district.
- **DO** be respectful and do not argue with the Member / staffer.
- **DON'T** be afraid to say "I don't know, I'll have to get back to you" if you are unsure of the answer to a question.

#### *After the Meeting*

- Send a thank you note to the Member and the staffers for the meeting.
- Continue to keep in contact especially when there are opportunities to work together or additional information to share, such as new funding, evaluation results, or new data reports.
- Let Safe States Alliance know about your visit and any planned next steps by calling 770-690-9000 or emailing [governmentrelations@safestates.org](mailto:governmentrelations@safestates.org).

## SAMPLE TALKING POINTS

Below are talking points that can be used to discuss the federal funding for injury and violence prevention, as well as the impact of proposed cuts on communities.

While these talking points can be used during meetings with members of Congress, they are merely a guide and will need to be further including specific examples. Please contact Safe States' government relations staff for support in reviewing and/or developing more specific talking points.



Good morning/afternoon! Thank you for taking time to meet with me. I am excited to talk to you today about the important role that public health departments play in keeping our communities safe.



In our state, we receive [XX] in federal funding from [XX] federal agencies. With this funding, we do [XYZ] to help people. *(Also provide examples of public health accomplishments in your jurisdiction as a result of federal investments.)*



Unfortunately, we're continually forced to do more with less. As a result of budget cuts/limited resources, we've had to... *(Describe limitations and resource constraints, and explain consequences.)*



Thank you for taking time out of your schedule today to meet with us! Please feel free to contact us if you need a resource or information about public health.

## FACTS ABOUT FEDERAL FUNDING

- Funding for most public health programs are well below 2010 levels.
- The President's budget proposal for FY19 would further shrink available funding for public health and all other domestic programs, cutting the CDC budget by over \$1 billion.
  - Specific cuts in the President's budget for the CDC Injury Center included \$2M for elder falls prevention (program elimination); \$8.5M for Injury Prevention Activities, which funds the Core State Violence and Injury Prevention Program; and a \$9M cut for Injury Control Research Centers (program elimination).