The first step in effective communications with Congress is determining the right person to contact. It is generally most effective to contact your own legislator (Senator or Representative) - the woman or man who represents your congressional district. As your elected official, this is the person who represents you and who must be sensitive to your views. Legislators maintain both a Washington, DC office and one or more offices located back home (in the district or in a couple of key cities throughout the state). APA can help identify and locate your legislator, or you can check the blue pages (government pages) of your phone book or call your local Republican or Democratic party office.
There may be occasions, however, when it will be appropriate and helpful to your purpose to contact other Members of Congress. For example, when the chair of a congressional committee wishes to monitor broad public opinion at a critical point in the legislative process, or when you have special expertise in a specific area in which a congressional committee or subcommittee is developing policy, your communication (whether informal or formal, for example, if you are called upon to testify before a congressional committee) is very important. In all instances, the APA education policy staff are available to assist and offer advice if you are interested in developing testimony or providing expertise on a particular issue.

Once you know whom to contact, you can obtain his or her Washington office telephone number, or be connected with the Washington office directly, by calling the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121. The Washington offices can give you addresses and telephone numbers for local district offices.

Understanding the Role of Congressional Staff

Whether calling, writing (or e-mailing), or visiting a congressional office, it is important to understand the role of your Representative’s or Senator’s staff members. Most congressional offices will have a legislative assistant (LA) handling your content area of interest. Many congressional staff members are recent college graduates and may appear relatively inexperienced; however they are very bright. In addition, each Senator and Representative relies heavily on his or her staff to be knowledgeable and informed on the issues. Because the information and advice they provide is often effective in shaping the legislator’s opinion on an issue, any time spent discussing your views with them will be a good investment.

In addition to the staff members in the legislator’s personal office, the committees and subcommittees of Congress also have professional staff members. These staff members are often more focused in their responsibilities. While a personal staff member usually has multiple subject areas of responsibility, for example, covering science issues, defense, budget, veterans’ issues, and environmental issues, a committee staff member is often able to specialize in a small number of areas and to acquire expertise in them. These staff members work for the legislator who chairs the committee or subcommittee or who serves as its ranking minority Member.

Staff members in legislators’ district offices serve still a different function. These staff members take care of the lawmaker’s appointments and appearances in the district. They also may serve as caseworkers to help resolve the problems of the district’s citizens as they relate to Federal programs. For example, a district office caseworker may help find out why a social security recipient’s check is late. Usually members of the personal district office staff are not involved in legislative issues.
Writing a Letter or Sending an E-mail as a Constituent

Congressional offices in Washington receive hundreds of letters from constituents each day. These guidelines will improve the effectiveness of our letter:

When addressing correspondence, this is the proper style:

Representative:
The Honorable Jane Smith
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Smith:

Senator:
The Honorable John Jones
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Jones:

BE...

Direct
State the subject of your letter clearly, keep it brief, and address only one issue in each letter.

Informative
State your own views, support them with your expert knowledge, and cite the bill number (House bill: H.R. #### or Senate bill: S. ###) of relevant legislation, if appropriate.

Always remember that your personally written letter is more highly regarded than pre-printed materials or postcards.

Constructive
Rely on the facts and avoid emotional arguments, threats of political influence, or demands.

Political
Explain the hometown relevance of the issue. If you are affiliated with an institution, use its stationery.

Discriminate
Write only on the issues that are very important to you and avoid the risk of diluting your effectiveness by writing too often.

Inquiring
Ask for the legislator’s view on the subject and how she or he intends to vote on relevant legislation. Expect a reply, even if it’s only a form letter.

Available
Offer additional information if needed and make sure your legislator knows how to reach you.

Appreciative
Remember to say “thank you” when it is deserved. Follow the issue after you write and send a letter of appreciation and thanks if your legislator votes your way.

Concise and to the point
The best letter is well written and is no longer than one page.

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3 This summary was extracted from the Congressional Record and reprinted with the permission of AARP/VOTE.
SAMPLE LETTER

[ADDRESS]

[DATE]

The Honorable [REPRESENTATIVE LAST NAME]
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative [LAST NAME]:

I am writing to you as a constituent and a psychologist regarding the Graduate Psychology Education (GPE) Program, which is funded through the Health Resources and Services Administration and administered through the Bureau of Health Professions. More specifically, I am writing to urge your support for a $6.5 million FY 2005 appropriation for the GPE Program, the only federal program solely dedicated to the support of psychology education and training.

The GPE program provides funds to universities and internship sites through a competitive grant process to support the interdisciplinary training of psychologists to work with underserved populations (e.g., elderly, children, rural persons, chronically ill, and victims of abuse and trauma). This funding supports the training of graduate psychology students to provide services to communities (rural and urban), which have little or no access to behavioral and mental health services.

For example, in our local community GPE funding is making a significant difference for the elderly, which as you know constitutes 13% of our state’s population. Through the multidisciplinary GPE program, nursing, dental and geropsychology graduate students are providing services to the elderly in hospital clinics, nursing homes and homeless shelters. This unique grant program is, in fact, enabling critically needed primary care services to be delivered to underserved populations all across the country.

I urge you to support the Graduate Psychology Education Program, which benefits so many underserved people especially those in rural communities. If you or your staff would like additional information regarding this grant or the GPE Program, please contact me directly. I look forward to keeping you informed about our progress and working with your office in the future.

Sincerely,

[NAME/TITLE]
Making a Telephone Call as a Constituent

The guidelines for making an effective telephone call to a congressional office are similar to those for effective letter writing, with a few additions. You can reach your legislator’s Washington office by dialing the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121, giving the name of your legislator, and asking to be connected with her or his office. To find the phone number of your legislator’s district office, look in the blue government pages of your local phone book or call your (area code) + 555-1212 and ask for your Senator’s or Congressperson’s phone number. Or go to the section of this document on “How to Find Your Members of Congress Online.”

When preparing for a telephone call, start at the beginning, just as you would in a letter, remembering that the person you talk to may have just gotten off the telephone with another constituent who had a very different concern. Be prepared with facts and information at your fingertips and clear idea of what you want your telephone call to achieve.

First, ask to speak with the legislative assistant who handles the subject of your interest. If the relevant staff member is not available, you can ask for a return call or leave a concise message on his or her voice mail, such as, “My name is Dr. Jan Jones and I am a professor of psychology at the University of Hometown. I am calling to ask for the Senator’s support on…” Be prepared to give you address or telephone number and remember to jot down the name of the person with whom you spoke and the information given (i.e., you may want to repeat this information to confirm its accuracy).
Meeting With Your Legislator

A carefully planned face-to-face visit with your legislator is the most effective means for conveying your message. Such a meeting can be arranged while you are visiting Washington. APA education policy staff is always willing to work with you to set up such a meeting, whether you are in town for an APA governance meeting or for another purpose. In addition, you can always personally arrange for a meeting in your legislator’s district office.

Make an appointment
Contact your legislator’s appointment secretary, state that you are a constituent and what the subject is that you wish to discuss. If it is clear that the legislator is unable to meet with you, then a very good substitute is a meeting with the relevant legislative assistant (LA). Legislators have a demanding schedule. In fact, you should not be surprised or disappointed if you meet with the LA, even if your appointment was scheduled to be with the legislator.

Do your homework
If possible, learn as much as you can about the legislator’s record as it relates to your issue.

Be on time
But don’t be surprised if they are not. Congressional schedules are hectic, and being a visitor to Capitol Hill often requires patience, flexibility, and preparation.

Establish ties
Introduce yourself, state where you reside in the district and a little about your involvement (i.e., “I am a psychologist working in the district school”). Establish your connection to the policy issue—why you are an expert. However, don’t get bogged down in small talk. You will have precious few minutes with the Member, so it is important to keep to your purpose for the meeting.

Be prepared
Have your information in a digestible, concise form, just as you would when writing a letter or making a telephone call. Know the opposing arguments as well as those in favor of your view. Take your cues on how to proceed from the policymaker. If he or she seems familiar with the issue, you can move right ahead. If not, take the opportunity to inform him or her.

Be inquiring
Ask your legislator to state his or her position on your issue. Know what you want in advance, and ask for it. Be tolerant of differing views and keep the dialogue open.

Be responsive
Try to answer questions. When you can’t, offer to get back to your legislator with the information.

Be concise and to the point
Busy legislators and staff appreciate short meetings for which the purpose is clearly and concisely presented.

Be appreciative
Thank him or her for the time spent with you.

Follow up
Send a thank you note after your meeting, capitalizing on the opportunity to restate your points.
SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

[DATE]

[ADDRESS]

The Honorable [NAME OF SENATOR]
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [LAST NAME]:

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to talk with you and [STAFF NAME] last Thursday regarding the Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization. I would also like to urge you again to support the American Psychological Association (APA) proposed amendments to HEA that increases mental and behavioral health services on college campuses.

As I explained, the provision of psychological services on campus is needed to address the increasing number of students who are seeking help for a range of mental and behavioral health concerns (e.g., eating disorders, anxiety, stress, alcohol abuse, drug use, depression, and suicide). Moreover, there is an increasing awareness that if these problems are not addressed, many college students will fail to graduate or be prevented from becoming productive citizens.

The proposed Campus Care and Counseling Act will make a significant and positive difference on college campuses. For example, on a recent Depression Screening Day held on our campus, hundreds of students were screened and identified with depression and anxiety disorders that, if left untreated, would impair a student’s capacity to learn and flourish academically. I also know there are many other students who are struggling with eating disorders and substance abuse, as well. A program, such as the proposed Campus Care and Counseling Act, would increase access to much needed mental and behavioral health services, and would go a long way to help students achieve their full potential.

It is with this in mind that I urge you to support the APA recommendations for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, including the proposed Campus Care and Counseling Act. Please let me know if I can provide further information.

Sincerely,

[NAME/TITLE]
Would it surprise you to know that your legislator might be interested in visiting your program or research? Sometimes the most convincing case is the one seen first hand. If your program (or research) is federally funded, then arranging a visit for your Representative/Senator is a natural opportunity for you and your legislator. Even if it is not, your legislator will want to know what is happening at a post secondary institution or training site in his/her district or state. Such visits keep lawmakers in touch with the interests and needs of their constituents, inform them about less familiar subject areas, and provide you with an opportunity to strengthen your relationship with the legislator. Especially attractive to a Representative/Senator is the opportunity to meet a great number of concerned and involved constituents during a congressional “District Work Period” when Congress stands in recess. Of course, the initiative to arrange such a visit will have to come from you.

**TIPS FOR ARRANGING A SUCCESSFUL SITE VISIT**

Appearances or site visits by public officials are exciting, but they require a great deal of advance planning. Here are a few tips:

1. Coordinate the visit with other local events. For example, if there is to be a ground breaking for a new research center at your university, request from university officials that an invite to your program be extended, as well. In addition, it is not a bad idea to plan a small reception for the legislator. Legislators like to meet with as many constituents as possible.

2. Arrange and coordinate the event with the staff scheduler from the Representative’s/Senator’s office. Send a written request with all the appropriated details (e.g., time, place, duration of the visit, number of attendees and other guests, activities planned, etc).

3. You may wish to have members of the local press attend the visit. First, be sure that your legislator’s press secretary is informed before members of the press are invited. If you are affiliated with an institution, you will want to contact the public relations office for assistance with the visit; and let APA’s Public Affairs Office know about the event (202) 336-5700, as well.

4. Notify anyone who will be affected by the visit, such as colleagues in your department and the university leadership, well in advance, and again the day before the event.

5. Provide the legislator’s office with precise and detailed directions to the event and designate a contact person who will be available as a liaison in advance of the event.

6. Meet the legislator before the event, allow time for introductions, and provide briefing on the itinerary and a time schedule for the event. Discuss important factors surrounding the visit, for example, the amount and source of Federal funds received.

7. Introduce your guest. Give a brief explanation of why he or she is visiting and announce whether or not there will be a question and answer sessions.

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*This section was adapted from Make Your Voice Heard with permission from AARP/VOTE.*
8. Follow up on any commitments made to the legislator at the event. Coordinate with the legislator’s press secretary on the details of a press release, if called for.

9. Don’t forget to send a thank you note, possibly containing photographs taken during the event, as well as any press clippings or news coverage generated by the event.

10. Stay involved. Participate in APA grassroots activities.

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**Education Advocacy Grassroots Activities**

**STAY INVOLVED**

The most effective means of getting psychology’s message to your Representative or Senators is to participate in grassroots activities. How can you do that? There are two ways that you can get involved. You can either join the Federal Education Advocacy Coordinators (FEDAC) grassroots network or the Public Policy Advocacy Network (PPAN). Both FEDAC and PPAN grassroots activities involve participating in letter writing and phone calling campaigns, opportunities to visit with Members of Congress or assisting with drafting Congressional testimony.

The FEDAC grassroots network enables psychologists to play a unique and active role in grassroots activities by volunteering to serve as a FEDAC representative at his/her campus or training site. As part of FEDAC, the Campus/Training Rep recruits colleagues to assist with Education Advocacy Action Alerts (i.e., requests for letters, phone calls), which are specific to the education advocacy agenda. The broader PPAN grassroots network offers a means for individual psychologists and psychology students to learn about education, public interest and science legislative initiatives, as well as respond individually to PPAN Education/ Public Interest and/or Science Action Alerts.

If you are interested in making your voice heard on issues of critical importance to psychology education and training, we urge you to join FEDAC or become a member of PPAN. Both grassroots networks will enable you to:

1. Assist with APA’s grassroots letter writing and phone calling campaigns;
2. Participate in constituent visits with your legislators;
3. Receive regular Education Advocacy Updates.

Further information about FEDAC and PPAN can be found at their web sites:

**FEDAC:**

**PPAN:**
ACTION ALERTS

Action Alerts are requests sent to members of the FEDAC and PPAN networks asking them to take immediate action by contacting their congressional delegation (either by telephone, email or fax) to request support for a pending legislative initiative of interest or concern to psychologists (See sample Action Alert below.) These Action Alerts are only sent out when it is clear that hearing from as many constituents as possible may make a difference.

SAMPLE ACTION ALERT

FEDERAL EDUCATION ADVOCACY COORDINATOR’S NETWORK (FEDAC) ACTION ALERT

Education Policy Office of the American Psychological Association

WHAT: We need your help in promoting the Senate version of the Campus Care and Counseling Act (S. 2215), which was introduced by Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Mike DeWine (R-OH), along with cosponsors Senators Gordon Smith (R-OR) and Hillary Clinton (D-NY)

WHEN: Please act TODAY. The Senate bill sponsors need your help in generating attention to and support for this bill so that at the appropriate time it will be successfully adopted as part of the Higher Education Act. Therefore, we need you, your colleagues, and your CTRs to call and urge support for the bill right away.

ACTION NEEDED: Please call, e-mail or FAX your Senators (through their Education Legislative Assistant) to urge them to become a co-sponsor of this important legislation introduced by Senators Reed and DeWine.

MESSAGE: Urge your Senators to become cosponsors of S. 2215, the Campus Care and Counseling Act, sponsored by Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) and Sen. Mike DeWine (R-OH). OR... Thank the sponsors (Reed, DeWine, Smith, Clinton) for introducing S. 2215.
SAMPLE SCRIPT TO URGE SUPPORT: A sample message [phone, email or FAX] follows:

“Hello, this is [NAME/TITLE] from [YOUR INSTITUTION/TOWN], and I am calling [WRITING] to urge [YOUR SENATOR’S NAME] to co-sponsor S.2215, the Campus Care and Counseling Act, which was introduced by Senators Reed and DeWine. S.2215 will authorize funding for a competitive grant program for centers on college campuses that provide mental and behavioral health services to students. Mental and behavioral health issues are often underlying factors impacting a student’s ability to succeed in college; these include a range of issues from living and coping independently to diagnosable mental disorders. This amendment seeks to improve success in college and protect the federal investment in our nation’s post-secondary students by strengthening the amount of, type of, and access to mental and behavioral health services on college campuses. For these reasons, I urge the Senator to co-sponsor the Reed/DeWine bill, S. 2215 authorizing support for centers on campus that provide mental and behavioral health services to students. Thank you for your time and consideration of my request.

Note: If you need to leave a voicemail message, include your name and phone number.

HOW TO CONTACT: Contact information for your Senators’ Offices (Phone, Email or FAX) can be found at the following website http://www.senate.gov
Note: Ask for (or address your email/FAX to) the Education Legislative Assistant.

BACKGROUND: The Campus Care and Counseling Act (S. 2215) amends the Higher Education Act of 1965 and authorizes $10 million in competitive grants to centers on college campuses that provide mental and behavioral health services to students. These funds could be used to increase and improve services on campus to better meet the psychological health needs of students in an effort to increase academic success in college. A companion bill was introduced in the House last November by Reps. Danny K. Davis (D-IL) and Tom Osborne (R-NE). Both these bills were developed and originated by APA.

Thanks so very much for your quick response!