

Advocacy Tool Kit--Communicating With Legislators

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Advocacy Tool Kit

The advocacy tool kit is designed to be a quick reference guide for advocates engaging in activities such as writing letters, making phone calls, or meeting with legislators. It also provides information on writing effective letters to the editor.

Members of Congress, though very busy, are usually anxious to hear the views of their constituents. Every JDRF volunteer, as a registered voter, has an impact on how their elected officials will vote on a particular issue.

To take it a step further, the strong relationships that JDRF advocates have, and can develop, with their elected officials form the foundation upon which Government Relations is built. You and your network of advocates can communicate with your legislators in many ways – personal meetings are usually the most effective, but phone calls and FAXED letters are also appropriate. Email to Members of Congress is not typically an effective tool for advocacy, unless quick action is needed and therefore may be requested in some alerts, but it is effective for one-on-one communication with staff once you have developed a relationship with them.

In general, when communicating with your legislator, remember the three “C”s:

- Contact:** Keep in regular contact with your legislator’s office;
- Cultivate:** A long-term relationship is key to advancing JDRF’s federal Government Relations agenda;
- Close:** Always leave with a specific request and follow up with a note of thanks.

A Note on Determining Your Legislators

If you, or an advocate from your area, need to determine who your Federal or State Senators and Representatives are, go to <http://www.congress.org> and visit the ‘My Elected Officials’ section in the top left of the screen. Simply enter your zip code and you will be matched to your legislators immediately.

If you do not have access to the web, please call the JDRF Government Relations office at 800-533-1868 and ask for the Grassroots Coordinator. Just give them your address and you will quickly be told who your Members of Congress are.

A. Writing to Your Legislator

Written communications from constituents are effective tools to deliver sincere and impactful messages to legislators. Letters serve to educate legislators and put a human face behind issues pertinent to the communities they represent. As you compose your letter, email or fax, please remember the following tips to deliver a powerful message to your legislator:

Make the Connection

- Connect to the Member by using his or her proper title (i.e., The Honorable, Representative Senator) and identifying yourself as a constituent.
- Connect to the disease by identifying yourself as a person living with diabetes, a family member or friend of a person with diabetes, a member of an organization directly related to the care of diabetes, etc.

Make the Request

- Be concise and ask the Member for something specific (e.g., support on a specific bill that affects Type 1 research).
- End the letter with a one or two sentence summary of the issue, and tell the Member exactly what you are asking him or her to do.

Make an Impression

- Keep a positive attitude by being polite and respectful even amidst frustration or disappointment about current events and actions.
- Thank the Member for his/her time, personally sign the letter, and ask for a response.
- If you receive a response from your letter, follow up with a letter specifically thanking the Member for his or her time and energy invested in listening to your concerns.
- If you do not receive a response, follow up with an email, phone call, or another letter.

Please remember that time will be needed to conduct a screening process of the mail and for staff to formulate a response to your letter, so please be patient in waiting for your Member's office to respond to you.

B. Calling Your Legislator

Calling a Member of Congress is a quick, easy, and effective way to generate support while retaining a personal atmosphere surrounding an issue. You can either call the Member's office or the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121. Remember the following tips before, during, and after you make the call to your Member:

Be Prepared

- Gather all the facts needed in order to effectively portray the issue.
- Refer to applicable fact sheets available at www.jdrf.org.
- Be prepared to answer any questions during the conversation and provide any additional information requested after the call takes place.

Make the Call

- Call the Member's office with your personal phone and on your personal time.
- Give your name, address, phone number, and email address and identify yourself as a constituent, a person living with diabetes, or anything that shows how you are personally connected to Type 1 diabetes.
- Ask to speak to or leave a message for the legislative aide responsible for health issues.
- Be honest, concise, clear, and polite when asking that the Member to take a specific action on legislation. Never argue with the staff member.
- Offer to provide additional information and request a letter in return.
- Thank the person on the phone and record the person's name and time of the call.

Follow-up

- If you receive a response, send a thank you letter to the Member for his/her time.
- If you do not receive a response, call or write the Member, providing the information from the original call.

Remember that thousands of constituents call and write Members of Congress every year, so one call may be accidentally forgotten. Always be patient and polite in every stage.

C. Meeting with Your Legislator

The best way to convey your concerns to a Member of Congress is by personally meeting with him or her or an aide.

Plan the Meeting

- Call the Member's office and ask to speak to the scheduler. Identify yourself and your relationship with JDRF. Be flexible in arranging a date and time for the meeting, and inform the scheduler how many people will be attending. Report the meeting time and place to JDRF.
- Ensure that all attendees know what is specifically being asked of the Member and anticipate any questions in return.
- Organize a small information packet for the Member to keep.
- Confirm the appointment the day before.

Deliver the Message

- Thank the Member for past voting records that favor JDRF's goals.
- Discuss personal stories and experiences with the Member and explain how policy action directly affects you.
- Be brief, clear, and polite when asking for the Member to take specific action on an issue.
- Carefully and politely listen to what the Member's views are on the topic no matter how it affects you, and also ensure the Member informs you of his/her position on the policy, whether it is in favor, against, or undecided.

Maximize the Impact

- Leave your information packet with the Member or his or her assistant along with your contact information so the office can respond to the meeting.
- Report your meeting to JDRF by sending information on who attended and a picture
- Send a thank you letter to the Member for spending time with you.

D. Writing Letters-to-the-Editor

Having a letter-to-the-editor published is a high impact method of delivering a pointed message to a wide range of people in a given population. Through this mode of communication, issues can be targeted toward a specific community and, most importantly, can catch the eye of your legislator.

Write the Letter

- Review JDRF's positions, statements, and facts before writing.
- Begin the letter with one sentence explaining why you chose to write.
- Give any personal information that ties you to Type 1 diabetes.
- Briefly explain why what you are writing about is important to you.
- Be honest and accurate when including facts.
- Do not stray from your message.
- Use proper grammar and language, and keep sentences short and on a specific topic.
- Do not endorse a political candidate or party.
- Never argue with a previous writer and use a polite tone.
- Many newspapers have a word limit, so keep the entire letter short.

Get Published

- Find out how many words your newspaper allows.
- Review letters that have been published and note length and content.
- Edit your letter to fit the newspaper's criteria and to enhance your message.
- List your name, address, phone number, and email address at the top of your letter.
- Submit the letter to the selected newspaper and wait for a response before sending it to a second one.

Work to develop a positive relationship with the media and be patient when attempting to become published, since many people write letters-to-the-editor every year. Keep in mind that the more focused your message is on a particular topic; the more likely it is to be published.

E. Communicating Effectively

Utilizing the appropriate mode of communication can be the difference between educating your Member about an issue, or discouraging them from listening to you entirely. Always remember these tips when you are communicating with your Member of Congress:

- Be concise, honest, clear, polite and specific when delivering your message and asking something of your Member of Congress.
- Give personal insight into your experiences with Type 1 diabetes.
- Be patient when interacting with Members of Congress or their staff.
- Be thankful for any attention given to you and for past support.
- Be prepared:
 - Know all the facts including past voting records.
 - Anticipate questions from the Member or staff person regarding the issue.
 - Have talking points prepared and pick a group spokesperson before meetings.

Most Effective Means of Communication:

- Personal meetings with Members.
- Personal letters, phone calls, or emails from constituents.
- Visits with business leaders in the district who are affected by Type 1 diabetes research.
- Articles and editorials in local newspapers.

Least Effective Means of Communication

- Letters, visits, or phone calls from non-constituents or business leaders outside of the district.
- Media advertisements.
- Computer-generated emails or letters.
- Partisan issue letters, papers, or phone calls.
- Spontaneous, faxed, mailed, or emailed brochures, fact sheets, newsletters, or position papers.

F. Reporting Your Contact with Legislators

A record should be kept of every interaction with any legislator. For events and meetings, the record should begin with the invitation and end with the “thank you” and follow-up. Please share this record with your Activation Leader on a routine basis.

Calls and letters (either mailed or faxed) should also be documented through written reports filed with the Activation Leader and with JDRF’s Washington, DC, office. If an advocate responds to an Action Alert by contacting his/her legislator, he/she should send an email back to the Activation Leader, noting that they responded, the date, to which legislators, and about which bill/issue.

Good records of contact mean that pertinent information can be held and used for future contact, to identify supporters of key initiatives, and to identify issues or concerns that need additional attention.

Please send this information to JDRF Government Relations, 1400 K Street, NW, Suite 1212, Washington, DC 20005, or fax it to (202) 371-2760.

G. Sample Letters to Members of Congress

Thanking a Member of Congress

[Your name and address appear here]

[Today's date]

The Honorable [insert Senator/Representative's name here]
United States [Senate/House of Representatives]
Washington, DC [20510/20515]

Dear [Senator/Representative]:

I am writing to thank you for your support for an expansion of the current federal policy that regulates human embryonic stem cell research. This research holds the potential to help scientists learn how an individual develops juvenile diabetes, and may some day lead to a cure for this disease. Finding a cure for juvenile diabetes is a personal mission for me, and this research gives me hope that a cure will be found for my daughter.

My daughter, Madeleine, is five years old and she has struggled with juvenile diabetes since birth. Her blood sugar was so unstable as a baby that she had to undergo 10-15 finger pricks and 4-5 insulin injections per day to maintain the delicate balance of blood sugar that so many take for granted. Finally, her doctors put her on an insulin pump to help ease the daily suffering this instability caused the entire family. Now, her blood sugar levels are more controlled due to the insulin pump, but she still averages 10 finger pricks per day and every other day she has to hold very still while we insert a needle into her. A strong investment in research is what promises to bring us to the day when Madeleine is free to be a healthy, happy, carefree child.

The information derived from embryonic stem cell research could ultimately be used to design therapies to prevent individuals from developing this dreadful disease. An expansion of the federal policy on embryonic stem cell research is essential for this research to reach its full potential, and could bring us to a cure for juvenile diabetes sooner rather than later.

Once again, thank you on behalf of all Americans who suffer from this terrible disease. I am hopeful that, with strong leaders like you, we will find a cure.

Sincerely,

[Your name here]

Asking for a Member's support

[Your name and address appear here]

[Today's date]

The Honorable [insert Senator/Representative's name here]
United States [Senate/House of Representatives]
Washington, DC [20510/20515]

Dear [Senator/Representative]:

I am writing to express my strong support for an overall 5% increase in Fiscal Year '07 appropriations for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), a successful federal investment that we cannot afford to neglect. I respectfully ask for your support for this critical funding.

My daughter, Madeleine, is five years old and she has struggled with juvenile diabetes since birth. Her blood sugar was so unstable as a baby that she had to undergo 10-15 finger pricks and 4-5 insulin injections per day to maintain the delicate balance of blood sugar that so many take for granted. Finally, her doctors put her on an insulin pump to help ease the daily suffering this instability caused the entire family. Now, her blood sugar levels are more controlled due to the insulin pump, but she still averages 10 finger pricks per day and every other day she has to hold very still while we insert a needle into her. A strong investment in research is what promises to bring us to the day when Madeleine is free to be a healthy, happy, carefree child.

The Diabetes Research Working Group, comprised of diabetes experts and established by Congress to guide in making diabetes research decisions, recommended \$1.6 billion for NIH diabetes research in 2004 (per the last conducted report). Actual funding today is only about \$1 billion. An overall increase of 5% for NIH in Fiscal Year '07 would enable the world's best researchers to take advantage of tremendous scientific opportunities in preventing, managing and eventually curing diabetes and the many complications related to the disease. One area that holds great promise is pancreatic islet cell transplantation, which has demonstrated remarkable results. Since the year 2000, over 500 people with juvenile diabetes have received islet transplants, and a majority of them no longer need to take insulin to live. Additional funding for this area of research would allow us to expand these trials to ensure that this treatment is safe and appropriate for children, so that all who have juvenile diabetes may benefit from the therapy.

An increase in NIH funding would also support investigations into genetic links and environmental factors as part of an effort to determine what causes juvenile diabetes. This information can then be used to design therapies to prevent individuals from developing this dreadful disease. Increased funding for the NIH would also allow for the expansion of gene therapy approaches to treat diabetes-related complications. All of this research is essential and will bring us to a cure for juvenile diabetes and related complications sooner rather than later.

On behalf of Madeleine and the many others who suffer from this terrible disease, thank you for considering my request. I hope that we can count on your support for a 5% overall increase in funding for NIH in FY '07. I look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Sincerely,

[Your name here]