

## **Engaging Your Elected Officials: A Primer**

Families of SMA strongly encourages its members and supporters to engage their elected officials in order to educate them about SMA and to request their support for government policies that positively impact the search for a treatment. While Families of SMA maintains an active advocacy campaign in Washington, D.C., "grassroots" communication is the key to any successful legislative endeavor - you CAN make a difference. Additionally, communicating with your elected representatives can be an incredibly empowering and rewarding experience.

This document provides tips on the following: (1) Identifying your Members of Congress; (2) Meeting in-person with your Members of Congress; and (3) Inviting your Members of Congress to a fundraising event.

### **Identifying Your Members of Congress**

Every American is represented in the United States Congress by one Member of the House of Representatives (who represents the legislative district in which you live) and two Senators (each of whom represent the entire state in which you live).

You can identify your Representative by going to [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and typing in your ZIP Code in the upper right hand corner of the screen. You may be prompted to type in your full address if your ZIP code straddles two legislative districts.

You can identify your two Senators by going to [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov), clicking on "Senators" and then sorting them by state where indicated.

### **Tips for Scheduling a Meeting with Your Members of Congress**

Most people do not realize that Members of Congress regularly meet with their constituents one-on-one; all you have to do is schedule an appointment. The meeting can take place in Washington, D.C. or in the Member's district/state office(s).

Meeting your federal officials face-to-face is probably the most effective form of advocacy. Here are some tips on setting up an appointment and how to conduct a meeting with your Members of Congress or their staff.

1. Contact your elected officials office by phone (this can be found on their website) and ask for the process for formally requesting a meeting. Be sure to be clear about whether or not you would like for the meeting to take place in Washington, D.C. or in the Member's district/State office.
2. Typically, you will need to write a letter which must be transmitted by email or fax to the Member's scheduler. Be sure to indicate that you are a constituent, to include some background information about you / your family and SMA, the date(s) you have available to meet (though it is better if you leave this someone open ended since Members are extremely busy), and your contact information.

3. Follow up with the scheduler. Be persistent and patient.

When your meeting takes place, use the time to tell your family's story. Frankly, this is much more compelling than simply laying out a litany of facts about SMA. Let the Member know about Families of SMA and your involvement with the organization. Explain that there has been great progress made towards finding a treatment, but that we are not there yet, and while there is no specific "ask" at this time, you hope that you can count on the Member's support should it be needed.

Remember that your meeting probably will be no more than 15 minutes. After the meeting, be sure to write and send a thank you note to the Member.

### **Tips for Inviting a Member to a Fundraising Event**

A great way to raise a Member's awareness to SMA is to invite him/her to a fundraising event, such as a walk-and-roll, a race, or some comparable event. While it is not appropriate to request that the Member make a financial contribution, it is appropriate to request that he/she play a formal role in the festivities. For example, the Member could either officially start off the walk-and-roll or welcome participants as they cross the finish line.

The process for requesting a Member's participation is the same as the process for requesting a meeting (i.e., you will need to send a formal request letter to the Member's scheduler via email or fax, whichever is preferred by that particular office). Be certain to be clear about the purpose of the event in your letter to the scheduler – it is useful to print the letter on official Families of SMA or Chapter letterhead. Also, play up the importance of the event, its past success, and expected attendance. Again, be persistent but patient.

If a Member does attend the event, see if you can get some press coverage. At the very least, make certain to have a photographer who can take pictures of the Member and send it to their staff for inclusion in his/her official newsletter and/or website.

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If you have any questions about the information contained in this document, please do not hesitate to contact Families of SMA's Legislative Coordinator, Spencer Perlman, and [spencer@fsma.org](mailto:spencer@fsma.org).