



National  
Kidney  
Foundation®

## Why Advocacy Matters

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### Facts and myths about advocacy

The Civil Rights movement, Women’s Suffrage, the environmental movement, Black Lives Matter, and the Tea Party. What do these have in common? They didn’t happen by accident and are all stories of successful grassroots advocacy efforts. A successful advocacy campaign is a joint effort that requires numerous people and tools to reach critical mass. Many people have become jaded about politics and advocacy. They rationalize staying out of the process, but that is the problem. If you don’t participate in the process, then your voice won’t be heard and you will not create change. Kidney disease patients need advocates, like you, who know what they face and can help improve their quality of life. Don’t you want to be the motivation for change?

- **Why me? I don’t know anything about politics!** You are the expert on kidney disease and have a moving story. You don’t need to be an expert on the political process to have a huge impact on policy and your elected officials want to hear from you – their constituent.
- **I am only one person and won’t make a difference.** There are many stories on Capitol Hill about a constituent visiting and influencing a legislator’s policy position. Advocacy is about building a chorus of likeminded advocates who care about an issue and achieving critical mass to affect change. If everyone thought “I don’t matter,” no one would be involved. Where would we be if George Washington, Susan B Anthony, or Martin Luther King said “I won’t make a difference?”
- **“All politics is local.”** Some of you may have heard the classic line from former Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill. You may not believe it, but it is true. 97% of staff on Capitol Hill feel that a visit by a constituent has significant influence on a legislator’s decisions.
- **There’s a lot of legislation and noise on Capitol Hill.** Between January 2013 and January 2015, Members of Congress introduced 9,184 bills. The typical Representative works an average of 70 hours per week when in session and 59 when out of session. They average 13 meetings per day with a wide array of groups. Our job as advocates for kidney disease patients – and the reason why your role is so important – is to cut through that noise and be heard.
- **Did you know that there are only 25 doctors and four nurses in Congress?** Compare this with 267 Members of Congress that served in the state legislature, the 213 lawyers, and the 100 who were educators. There is a lot of work to be done to educate our legislators about health care and kidney disease!
- **Legislation moves so slowly, why bother?** Our Founding Fathers deliberately designed Congress to be slow as a way of providing checks and balances. This provides us with more time to reach out to our elected officials to educate them about our views and priorities.

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- **Nothing happens in Washington, DC, why waste the time?** While some would argue that Congress has been less productive over the last decade, many bills are still passing. Advocacy is also about laying the groundwork for future years, and is not just about making a big splash. Most bills take several years to mature, and sometimes it is important to advocate to prevent harmful legislation from passing Congress. Also, keep in mind that there are many regulatory initiatives being proposed by the government that we need to react to.
- **A lobbyist will get a meeting more easily than I can.** 65% of House Chiefs of Staff would rather get a request from a constituent for a meeting than from anyone else. It is very rare for a constituent not to be given a meeting with the Member or staff, but it is common with lobbyists.
- **Advocacy is hard and takes so much time to participate.** There are many ways to participate and have a huge impact. It is true that meeting your legislator in DC, or in their home state, requires time—but you can call their office or write a letter about NKF priorities. You can blog. You can tweet or post on Facebook about the importance of a bill or issue and share this with them. All of these things make a huge impact and do not require a significant amount of your time.
- **Legislators don't care about the opinions of people of the other party!** They may not always vote the way you would like them to, or support all the issues you support, but legislators care about the lives and views of their constituents. More importantly, many issues such as preventing and managing kidney disease rises above politics. Reluctance to form a relationship with your legislator because of a difference in political views only limits your potential and hurts kidney disease patients.
- **Influencing politics is all about money!** It isn't only about money, any more than it is about protesting in the streets or shouting the loudest. It is about advocates like you making a good argument and using all the tools at your disposal. Many of the most influential groups in DC, like AARP or the American Diabetes Association, don't contribute to political campaigns. Even those that do, like the NRA or the Chamber of Commerce, rely on their grassroots advocates to exert influence on legislators.

Contact Andrew Fullerton at [NKFadvocacy@kidney.org](mailto:NKFadvocacy@kidney.org) if you have any questions or would like to get involved.

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