

Tips and Talking Points for Congressional Meetings

Keys to Successful Congressional Meetings

- **Arrive on time.** Be punctual - arriving a few minutes early is best. Let the office staff know ahead of time how many of you will be attending so they can accommodate your group. It is best to keep your group somewhat small as many Congressional offices tend to have very little space.



The office may ask if you are from the District. If not, be prepared to speak on behalf of an organization in the district that is a part of the coalition.

- **Remain flexible.** Members and staff are constantly pulled in multiple directions and their schedules frequently shift with little notice. This is not personal to you or our mission.
- **Be polite.** Create a polite, respectful environment for discussion by keeping your personal political views out of the conversation and focusing your time on advocating for specific issues.
- **Know the issue.** Present the issue and goals of the organization/group in a clear and concise manner, using personal experiences and anecdotes throughout.
- **Prepare a request.** Know what your specific request for the office will be, and make your request of the office clear and concise at the beginning of the meeting.
- **Keep it brief.** Meetings on Capitol Hill last 15-20 minutes and can get cut short due to votes, hearings, phone calls, etc. District offices tend to have more flexibility and time to meet. Get your most important messages out early.
- **Meet them where they are.** Open the meeting by politely asking the staffer how familiar he or she is about ACEs. If they are familiar with ACEs, you can save time by not providing all of the background information you might need to provide to someone unfamiliar with the issues around trauma. Encouragingly, more and more Congressional staff are becoming knowledgeable on this issue—a stark contrast from 3-4 years ago when virtually nobody was aware.
- **Speak only to what you know.** If you are asked a question that you do not know the answer to, simply say you will get back to them with the answer. When you do answer them at a later date, you will ideally answer with written material that supports your answer. Please contact the National Campaign Core Team at TraumaCampaign@gmail.com for assistance with following up.
- **Arrive with materials.** Present and leave behind in-depth material and contact information, but keep the paper you provide the staffer during the meeting to a minimum (such as a 1-2 pager, a trifold, etc.). The Campaign infographics can be used. Know that they will likely be reading it while you are talking. Do not be concerned about this.
- **Be gracious.** Be sure to thank the Member/Staff for taking the meeting.

- **Keep the momentum going!** Be sure to follow up with the staff member within a day or two via email, thanking them for the meeting and summarizing any follow-up information you promised. Staying in touch and building relationships is the key to success when working with Congress.



If you are trying to meet in person with your Congressperson in your District, make sure to request a meeting while Congress is in recess, otherwise the Member will likely be working in the DC office. You can find out when Congress is in session and when they are in recess by visiting the [House](#) and [Senate](#) calendars.

Talking Points

Who We Are

Explain who you are and your connection to/interest in the issue. You may be representing yourself or a coalition. Either way, you can share that you are a part of this national Campaign that is focused on strengthening federal, state, and local actions to prevent and address childhood trauma and build resilience. If you live or work in the Congressperson's District, make that clear at the beginning that you are a constituent.

The Crisis

Adverse Childhood Experiences, or "ACEs," are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (ages 0-17 years).

Examples include:

- experiencing violence or abuse
- witnessing violence in the home or community
- having a family member attempt or die by suicide

Also included are aspects of a child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding, such as growing up in a household with the presence of:

- substance use disorders
- mental health challenges
- instability due to parental separation or to household members being in jail or prison

The Impacts

Traumatic experiences dramatically affect millions of Americans across the United States. Research has shown that toxic stress and trauma experienced during a child's neurodevelopment are associated with mental health and substance use issues as well as many chronic physical health conditions. These experiences can hinder a student's ability to learn, prevent a veteran from reintegrating into society, or impede an adult from meaningfully participating in the workforce.

The Campaign's Goals

- Addressing and preventing ACEs by creating a resilient, trauma-informed society where all individuals, families, and communities have the opportunity and support needed to thrive.
- Raising awareness about the prevalence and immediate and lifelong impact of childhood trauma on individuals and using that knowledge to reexamine how we interact with and support each other throughout society.
- Communicating the costs of trauma to federal, state and local governments.
- Engaging policy makers to create and pass policies that prevent and address childhood trauma, and its effects, and build resilience.

The Benefits

- Addressing and preventing ACEs could save the federal government [\\$217 billion per year in healthcare costs](#) while simultaneously improving health and wellbeing for all of us.
- A trauma-informed approach is designed to identify and address the root causes of some of our most pressing public health issues including addiction, obesity, depression, chronic mental health issues, and more.
- After becoming trauma-informed, school teachers, correctional officers, childcare workers, and social workers, among others, are better able to serve their communities by working with people who have experienced trauma from a perspective of understanding.

Related Activity in the Congressperson's District

Provide information on trauma-informed activities, programs, trainings, etc. going on in the Congressperson's District. Tying the discussion back to relevant activity in the District usually gets the staff person's attention, and identifying actionable items for your Congressperson to follow up on will illuminate the ways in which constituents would directly benefit from the office's activity.

Our Request Today

We request that your office join the **House Trauma Informed-Care Caucus** co-Chaired by Representatives Danny Davis (D-IL) and Mike Gallagher (R-WI).



To join the Caucus please contact:

*Jill Hunter-Williams (Jill.Hunter-Williams@mail.house.gov)
in Congressman Davis' office at 5-5006 (Democrat)*

*Maggie Woodin (Maggie.Woodin@mail.house.gov) in
Congressman Gallagher's office at 5-5665 (Republican)*

*This tip sheet is a part of a comprehensive resource we have assembled to empower you in your advocacy efforts. To view our complete **Caucus "Ask" Toolkit**, along with additional tools, learning materials, and advocacy ideas, please visit CTIPP.org/NationalTraumaCampaign. Please also feel free to reach out to the National Campaign Core Team at TraumaCampaign@gmail.com for additional guidance and support. Thank you so much once again—the massive paradigm shift we envision occurring over the next few years would not be possible without you!*