

# How To Be Your Own Best Advocate!

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The Center for Senior Services works with Congress, the department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and others in the housing industry to work for seniors and advocate for the senior housing program.

## Advocacy for Senior Issues

- Housing
- Income Protection
- Healthcare
- Medicare/Medicaid
- Older Americans Act
- Aging in Place
- Other Federal programs
- We are members of various coalitions in the aging and housing industry



# What is Advocacy?

- Advocacy is the act of making an argument in support of a cause, idea, or policy. One can engage in advocacy by meeting with a lawmaker on an important issue, writing an editorial for a newspaper, raising awareness for a cause at a community event, or even promoting an issue while having dinner with friends.
- Advocacy occurs when an individual engages in dialogue about an issue they care about. It can occur in many forms - - speaking out, letter writing, protesting, voting, and even wearing a t-shirt that makes a statement.

# Why Advocate?

- Local, State and Federal Government programs can heavily impact seniors. Some examples of the Federal programs:
  - Service Coordinators
  - Social Security
  - Affordable Housing
  - Health Care (Medicare and Medicaid)
  - Nutrition Programs (i.e. SNAP)

## Why Advocate (continued)

- When a crisis hits, such as a natural disaster, pandemic, you want your Local, State and Federal officials to know you already exist in their district. They should know your residents and potential issues that might affect the well being of your residents.
- Be proactive!

# Who Will be Your Audience?

- Federal: Your elected members of Congress – Each state has two members in the Senate and each Congressional district has one member in the House of Representatives.
- State: Your elected members of your state legislature.
- Local: Your elected Council members, Mayor, County Executive, etc.

# Why are your elected officials your audience?

- Because they make the policies that affect you and your residents on the local, state and federal level.
- Examples:
  - Local level: bus stop near your building
  - State level: state funded programs that benefits seniors regarding health care, nutrition and etc.
  - Federal level: funding for Section 202 housing
  - Federal and state programs: expanding Medicaid



# Where?

- Elected officials on the local level (mayor, council members, county executive) have their offices in your city and even neighborhood
- Elected officials on the state level (state delegates, senators, etc.) have offices in your location and usually in the State Capitol
- Federally elected representatives (US Representatives and Senators) have offices in their local districts, states and in Washington, DC

# Last but not least...who would be the best advocate?

- The constituents of those elected officials:
  - The residents
  - Staff
  - Board members and volunteers
  - Family members and friends of the residents

We as constituents have a right to voice our opinions on issues that affect us. Empowering residents to make sure their elected officials know how their policies affect them is how our government works.

# Resident Association Advocacy Pre-Covid-19

- Writing/emailing a letter to your representative
- Calling your representative
- Getting residents involved in a phone or letter writing project
- Inviting your representative for a tour of your building
- Face to face meeting with representative or housing staffer

# Writing a letter to Congress

- Correspondence can be one of the most effective tools to advocate to your representative.
- Allows you to explain how existing/proposed legislation personally impacts your life.
- Allows the message to come from the you (or the residence association), who is your own best advocate.
- You can state how they directly benefit from affordable housing.

# What makes a great letter?

- One to two pages – hand written and individualized.
- Thank the member of Congress in the beginning and end of the letter for reading the correspondence.
- Provide a little context for who is the writer.
- Don't get stuck on numbers and policy.
- Answer the question, how will I be impacted?
  - For example, what happens if I lose my rental subsidy.

## Calling your Member's office

- Calling your representative's office is a great and quick way to express your opinion.
- Can be easier to organize a phone calling operation than a letter writing campaign.
- Allows your member to immediately know your position on an issue as opposed to the mail.
  - **Great for time sensitive issues**

## How Do I Make An Effective Phone call?

- Rehearse what you are going to say.
- Make a script.
- Remember the call should only last two minutes. If it's a polarizing issue, it's likely that many people are calling as well.
- Be friendly and say "thank you."

Invite Your Member To Tour Your Building!





# Why ask my representative to visit the building?

- Fabulous way for your representative to see how HUD funding creates affordable housing for low-income seniors.
- Creates opportunity for the residence association to ask your representatives questions.
- Can leave a valuable impression for the representative to take back to Washington, D.C.
- Representative can see all the great things happening in the building, like the great work performed by service coordinators and the importance of residence associations.

# B'nai B'rith Homecrest House and Congressman Raskin



# Advocacy During COVID-19—What has stayed the same and what has changed?

- Emails and phone calls allow for immediate advocacy which is important during the pandemic.
  - Legislation to respond to COVID-19 can be fast moving. Calls allow for your views to be recorded with more immediacy.
  - Congressional offices have limited staff actually working on Capitol Hill. Less staff members to read the mail.
- Schedule a call with your member's community liaison to talk about what's going on with your building.
- No face to face meetings

# Benefits of a working relationships with congressional offices during COVID-19 and beyond

- Congressional offices can provide you with your local health department's contact information to get your questions answered.
- Congressional offices may have contacts in the community which can assist with obtaining personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies and food.
- Congressional offices can help your residents with agency case work like with the Social Security Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Health and Human Services.

# What will advocacy look like post-COVID-19?

- We expect no face-to-face meetings until the pandemic is over.
- There may be more access to remote advocacy such as pre-arranged conference calls and video conferencing because of how easily available these tools are to the general public and how time consuming visits are for the staffers.
- Visits to buildings will resume eventually.
- Phone calls will still be the most effective way to advocate for a time sensitive issue.

# Case Study #1 Affordable Senior Housing

- The President's proposed 2023 budget is released in February 2021. According to the budget, the President is proposing to raise the rent on seniors who live in HUD sponsored affordable housing. Congress will begin drafting budget legislation. The residents hear about this in the news. What can the residents and the resident association do to influence their member of Congress?

## Case Study # 2 Bus Stop

- There is a popular bus line that goes right in front of your building making stops at the local pharmacy and grocery store. However, the bus stop is 8 blocks away. Many of the residents of your building wish that the bus stop was in front of the building. What can the resident association do to try and get the bus stop in front of the building?

# Advocacy Conclusions

- Don't wait for a crisis! Be proactive and advocate on seniors issues.
  - Calling
  - Writing a Letter
  - Inviting lawmakers and their staff to your building
- Develop and maintain working relationships with congressional offices.