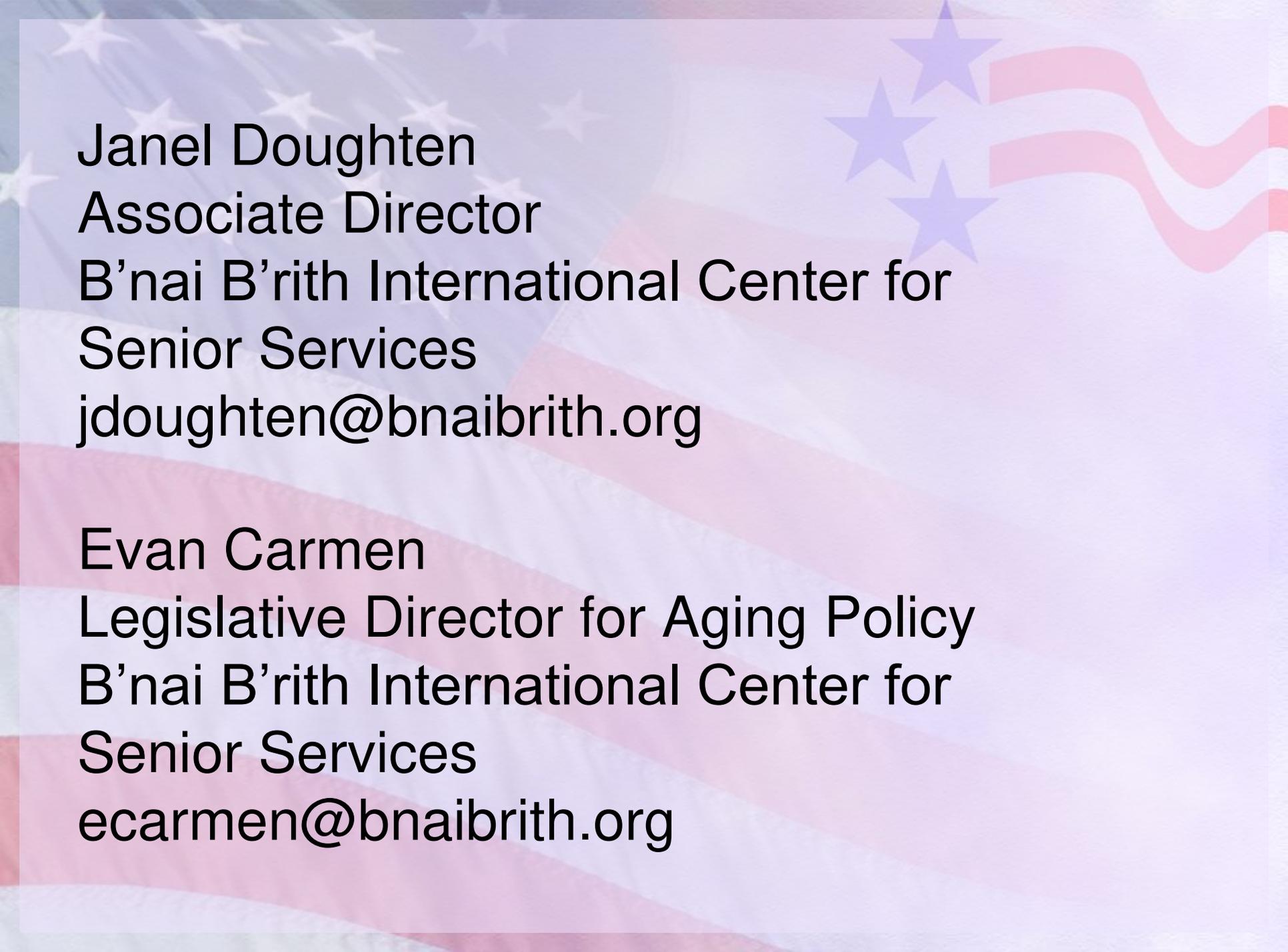


# How To Be Your Own Best Advocate!

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&  
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The background of the slide is a stylized American flag with a light blue and white star field in the upper left and red and white wavy stripes in the lower right.

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# How To Be Your Own Best Advocate!



# 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.

# 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, who is your own best advocate.
- You can state how you 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”

# Constituent Correspondence Example 1

Dear Congressman Bartlett:

I voted for you three times, and I think you are wonderful. Please don't cut HUD's budget.

- John J. \_\_\_\_\_

# Constituent Correspondence Example 2

- Mr./Ms. Insert Name
- 1234 Main Street
- Anytown, USA 12345

•  
• March 13, 2017

• Honorable *[Insert Member's Name]*  
• *[Insert Office Building]*  
• Washington, DC 20515

• Dear Congressman or Senator *[insert name]*:

• My name is *[insert name and age]* and I am a resident of *[insert building name]* in *[insert city and state of building]*. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. I have been living in this building for the past *[insert number]* years. Prior to living in this building I *[insert a couple of sentences regarding previous employment and personal history]*.

• Unfortunately, I have read that the White House is proposing to cut the federal budget from HUD. As someone who greatly benefits from Section *[insert section of the Act]* affordable housing for the elderly, I am very worried about any potential cuts to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's budget as it relates to rental subsidies *[insert name of rental subsidy]* and the service coordinator program.

• During my time living in *[insert name of building]* I have benefited in countless ways from affordable housing and my service coordinator named *[insert name. After this sentence please refer to the service coordinator by name]*. *The rest of this paragraph should be dedicated to specific examples of how the resident benefited from affordable housing and the service coordinator. For example, what would their housing situation would be but for living in B'nai B'rith apartments and receiving the benefits of rental subsidies. In addition, what specific work the service coordinator does for the resident. It would be valuable if they could draw a specific connection to the work the service coordinator performs by allowing them to age in place and not being required to move to a nursing facility. This paragraph is where the personal stories are shared.*

• Thanks again for reading my letter. I hope you do whatever you can to protect rental subsidies and the service coordinator program for people who live in *[insert name of building]*.

• Sincerely,

# 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."

# Sample Script for Phone Call

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old. I live at [name of building], a HUD Section 202 funded community, in your district/state. I rely on HUD Section 202 funding through PRAC/PBRA to help me with my housing expenses and to pay for a Service Coordinator to help me get the services I need to stay in my home.

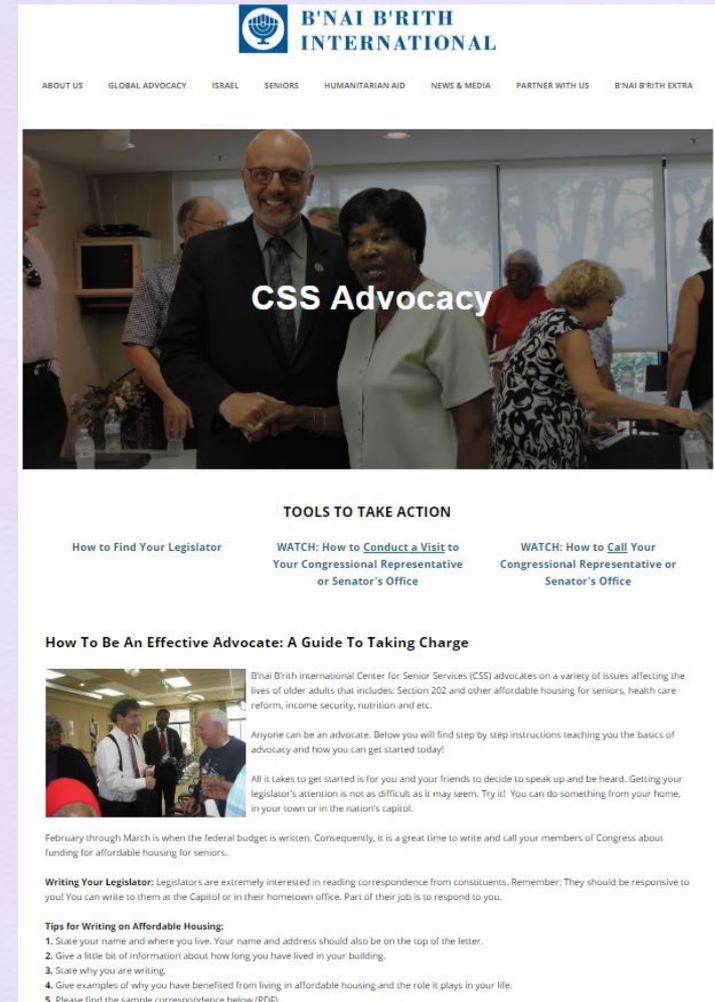
Our Service Coordinator is named \_\_\_\_\_. (S)he helps me with \_\_\_\_\_. She makes sure I do not have to move somewhere else like a nursing home. If I do not have someone here in the building to help me I may not be able to stay here.

Please tell Representative/Senator

\_\_\_\_\_ to protect funding for the HUD Service Coordinator and HUD Section 202 housing programs. Cutting funds for the programs we need is wrong. We live on a fixed income, have worked all our lives, and need a safe place to live. Thank you.

# CSS Advocacy Webpage Resources

- <https://www.bnaibrith.org/css-advocacy.html>
- How To Be An Effective Advocate: A Guide To Taking Charge
  - Writing Your Legislator
  - Calling Your Legislator
  - Meeting With Your Legislator
  - How To Find Your Legislator



**B'NAI B'RITH INTERNATIONAL**

ABOUT US GLOBAL ADVOCACY ISRAEL SENIORS HUMANITARIAN AID NEWS & MEDIA PARTNER WITH US B'NAI B'RITH EXTRA

## CSS Advocacy

**TOOLS TO TAKE ACTION**

[How to Find Your Legislator](#)      **WATCH:** How to [Conduct a Visit](#) to Your Congressional Representative or Senator's Office      **WATCH:** How to [Call](#) Your Congressional Representative or Senator's Office

### How To Be An Effective Advocate: A Guide To Taking Charge

B'nai B'rith International Center for Senior Services (CSS) advocates on a variety of issues affecting the lives of older adults that includes: Section 202 and other affordable housing for seniors, health care reform, income security, nutrition and etc.

Anyone can be an advocate. Below you will find step by step instructions teaching you the basics of advocacy and how you can get started today!

All it takes to get started is for you and your friends to decide to speak up and be heard. Getting your legislator's attention is not as difficult as it may seem. Try it! You can do something from your home, in your town or in the nation's capitol.

February through March is when the federal budget is written. Consequently, it is a great time to write and call your members of Congress about funding for affordable housing for seniors.

**Writing Your Legislator:** Legislators are extremely interested in reading correspondence from constituents. Remember: They should be responsive to you! You can write to them at the Capitol or in their hometown office. Part of their job is to respond to you.

**Tips for Writing on Affordable Housing:**

1. State your name and where you live. Your name and address should also be on the top of the letter.
2. Give a little bit of information about how long you have lived in your building.
3. State why you are writing.
4. Give examples of why you have benefited from living in affordable housing and the role it plays in your life.
5. Please find the sample correspondence below (PDF).

# Downloadable sample letter and script

## How to find your Legislator

## Sample videos

### Tips for Writing on Affordable Housing:

1. State your name and where you live. Your name and address should also be on the top of the letter.
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5. Please find the sample correspondence below (PDF).

Sample Letter

Sample Letter w/o Service Coordinator

### Calling Your Legislator:

Legislators are extremely interested hearing from constituents. Remember: They should be responsive to you! You can call them at the Capitol or in their hometown office. Part of their job is to listen and respond to you. When you call, a staff assistant will answer the phone, but your message will go to the legislator.

### Tips for Calling Your Legislator:

Write down what you want to say. In case you get nervous or lose your thought, having notes written down will help you to stay on target and direct the flow of the conversation.

1. Introduce yourself and state your name and where you live.
2. Tell them the issue you are calling about and why the issue is important to you.
3. Be specific as to what you are asking for.
4. Thank the person for taking your call.
5. Please see the sample dialogue for a call below (PDF).



Download a PDF Version of a Sample Phone Call



**Meeting With Your Legislator:** Legislators enjoy visiting B'nai B'rith affordable housing properties. These visits provide a great opportunity for lawmakers to visit a building in partnership with the federal government and learn more about seniors issues. After the tour, your legislator can meet with residents in a town hall style format and discuss issue that impact seniors such as affordable housing, health care, income security, nutrition and etc.

### Tips for Scheduling a Visit With Your Legislator:

1. Try and schedule your meeting when Congress is not in session. If you are not sure, you can call and ask.
2. Again, write out what you want to say so that you can stay focused. Try to separate the myths from the facts.
3. Do your research: know all about your legislators (committees, recent votes and etc.) so that you will know what to expect.
4. B'nai B'rith sponsored buildings should reach out to us for assistance. We have

hosted lawmakers at our sponsored buildings numerous times, and we can use our expertise to ensure the visit goes smoothly and your issues get discussed. Email us at [seniorservices@bnaibrit.org](mailto:seniorservices@bnaibrit.org).

### Tips for Meeting with your Legislator:

1. Know the status of the issue you are concerned about. Is there any major legislation pending that could impact affordable housing, health care, income security, nutrition issues and etc. The CSS team is always monitoring pending legislation to keep you updated on all issues.
2. State your concerns and explain how this impacts you. Tell them about your personal experiences...it works! They need to know how a bill will hurt or help you in everyday life. Tell a story with real emotion to show how much the issue really means to you.
3. Say exactly what you want the legislator to do, support a bill, oppose a bill or improve a bill to make it better.
4. Thank the legislator for their time and offer a firm handshake.

### Tips to Remember!

1. Be in control. Don't be intimidated. Politely explain what you want and don't get sidetracked.
2. Be specific about what you want to see happen.
3. Get a firm answer.
4. Make it clear that you will monitor the legislator's actions.

### How To Find Your Legislator:

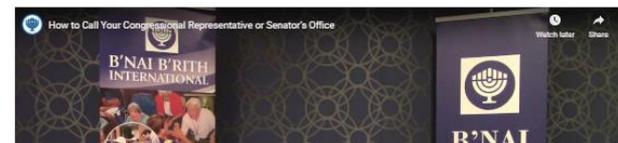
1. Senate <https://www.senate.gov/senators/contact>
2. House of Representatives <https://www.house.gov/> (top right corner)



### How to Conduct a Visit to Your Congressional Representative or Senator's Office



### How to Call Your Congressional Representative or Senator's Office



# How to Call Your Congressional Representative or Senator's Office

## How to Call Your Congressional Representative or Senator's Office



Invite Your Member To Tour Your Building!



# Why ask my representative to visit the building?

- There is no better way to show your representative how HUD funding creates affordable housing for low-income seniors than showing them what it looks like.
- Creates opportunity for you 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, management, maintenance and etc.
- Highlights the supportive community the residents have created.

# How Do I Arrange An On-Site Visit?

- Call your representatives district/state office and ask for the scheduler's contact information.
- Be mindful that representative's schedules can book up months in advance.
- Have several proposed dates for a representative's visit.
- Being careful to pick weekends and weekdays when Congress is not in session.
- Who will meet with the representative?
- Know what you have planned for the representative if they visit:
  - Tour
  - Question & Answer with residents

# 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.

# 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.