AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PAIN MEDICINE (AAPM)
OVERVIEW – ADVOCATING TO CONGRESS.

WHAT TO EXPECT ON CAPITOL HILL
Meetings have been scheduled for you with your Members of Congress. Where they were unavailable, you are meeting with the appropriate legislative aide. Please do not underestimate the value of meeting with congressional staff because they will act on your request. In many instances, the staff will know more about the details of the issue than the Members. They are typically well-schooled in the issues, responsive to constituent contact, and in constant communication with the Representative or Senator. They are also regular people. There is no reason to feel intimidated, so relax and be yourself.

Congressional offices, particularly House offices, are small and often without separate meeting rooms. Expect to have a meeting standing in the hall outside the office, in a busy reception area or in a cafeteria. Offices often have very tight time constraints. Ask how much time they have or the meeting may be over before you even make your request. Unless you are told otherwise, assume you have been scheduled for no more than 15 minutes of time. Also, do not be surprised if the start of the meeting is delayed due to official business. This is the normal pace of congressional business.

WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR CONGRESSIONAL AUDIENCE
Personalize pain care by relating your daily routine. Members of Congress or their staff probably do not have a clear understanding of pain care and its impact on you, your patients, and your facility. You want the Member or staff to identify you with pain care.

Make your request. The most common mistake made in advocacy meetings is to forget to make your request of the Member and/or his staff. The purpose of your visit(s) is to ask Members of Congress to support AAPM legislative and appropriations priorities. This could be done by sending a letter requesting funding for a project or program, signing their name to a colleague’s letter, or cosponsoring a bill or contacting an agency. The specific request will be relayed during the morning briefing. Remember, make the request when in the meeting and be sure to follow up after you have returned home. Forgetting to follow up is the second most common mistake in advocating an issue.

Be pleasant. Remember to try to make eye contact and smile as much as possible during your remarks. In closing, thank them for the meeting. Days are long on Capitol Hill at this time of year, and a brief acknowledgment of the time they spend with you is always appreciated. Be sure to repeat the importance of the request you made, note their response and leave in time to make your next meeting.

WHAT DO YOU AVOID IN A MEETING?
Stick to the issue at hand; there will be 2-3 issues and requests you make in one meeting. Do not bring up other topics that detract from your goal. Airing grievances and pet peeves or complaining about the member's voting record should be saved for personal communication at another time.

WHAT IF THEY SIMPLY SAY “NO?”
If the Member of Congress has not supported AAPM's requests in the past, make note of it, but do not complain. Try to encourage future support. If the answer is still “No, I’m sorry I can’t help with that,” ask them what they would be willing to do. They might not be able to help this time, or even next time, but keeping track of rejections to reasonable requests will give you leverage when on your 3rd or 4th visit you can say, “I have seen you for the last 3-4 years and you haven’t helped with any of my concerns. Is there anything you can think of to help on these issues?” You would be surprised how many Members of
Congress who, even when diametrically opposed to your request for whatever reason, will try to make it up in some fashion when this is noted. The key however, is to remain level headed, persistent and polite.

**WHAT TO LEAVE BEHIND**

Folders of information have been prepared for your visit(s). This material reinforces your message and request(s) and must be left with each office that you visit. Folders will include:

(1) AAPM and pain care specific information;
(2) a detailed position and request paper for every issue you will raise;
(3) as necessary, a sample draft letter for the Member to sign;
(4) as necessary, summaries and copies of language for any bill the Member will be asked to support;
(5) other relevant information such as studies, past letters, sample ‘report’ language, and other materials.

*Try not to share your packet of material until the meeting is over (unless asked). Otherwise, the Member or staff may start reviewing the material and not listen quite as carefully to your remarks.*

**WHAT TO TAKE HOME – YOUR GOALS**

Get the name of the congressional staff person or his/her business card. Make your request. Record your impressions of the level of understanding and interest you encountered in each office. You will be asked to share these reactions during the debriefing session on the last day. This feedback is critical.

**IF YOU DID NOT GO TO WASHINGTON, WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT WHEN YOU CALL A CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE OR FOLLOW UP REGARDING A LETTER OR E-MAIL?**

If you call the Washington office to discuss pain care issues, you will likely be transferred to the Congressman or Senator's Legislative Assistant who handles healthcare (known as the “Health LA”). This individual may be young and very busy, but they are the 'ear' for your representative on health policy. Get to know the LA, by telling them about you, your patients and your practice - personalize it for them whenever possible. This relationship is a fundamental step as you interact with your legislators.

AAPM will periodically provide sample letters on its website for members to use in contacting their members of congress. You will be given simple information to identify your local Congressman and Senators as well as their contact information. Usually, you will be asked to personalize a letter by not only giving your name and the facility you are affiliated with but relating how the support you are seeking will impact you and the patients you treat. New draft letters will coincide with AAPM advocacy visits and when important issues are focused on in Congress.