

**LEADINGAGE**  
*ADVOCACY*  
*CHAMPIONS*  
**TOOLKIT**





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# YOU CAN BE A LEADINGAGE ADVOCACY CHAMPION

**A**t LeadingAge, we advocate for public policies that remove barriers to care, develop new services, advocate for affordable senior housing and make this country a better place to age. These policies are influenced every day by lawmakers in DC and state capitols as they make decisions that impact the people that LeadingAge serves.

Join us as a LeadingAge Advocacy Champion to help share your story and let our elected officials know that they have a role in helping older adults throughout the country. Our LeadingAge Advocacy Champion program is an important way for you to stay connected and help us advance our mutual advocacy goals.

We have terrific staff in DC regularly talking to members of Congress. However, there is nothing more important to legislators on Capitol Hill than hearing from their own constituents. Your story can draw a picture better than any graph or table. When we combine our efforts in DC with advocacy activities and examples from the experiences of members and the people they serve, it has a real impact. Imagine what happens when our 6,000 members and partners are all advocating at the same time!

When you commit to being an advocate, we at LeadingAge will provide you tools for success: easy-to-understand summaries, sample letters, talking points, even tweets. We will also help you figure out how – and when – to contact your members of Congress. Our goal is to engage you and other LeadingAge members regularly to help connect the dots for legislators on how their decisions impact your community.

We are asking you to become a LeadingAge Advocacy Champion! This toolkit will explain how your voice and story can make a difference.



# TIME TO TAKE ACTION

When LeadingAge engages in a legislative campaign at the state or federal level, we will share via email with our LeadingAge Advocacy Champions:

- Why the campaign is important.
- How we think the legislation will move in the coming weeks, days, and months.
- Important lawmakers to target.
- Key moments when it is time to act.
- Suggested language for you to use in your communication with lawmakers.

We may be asking you to engage with lawmakers while they are in DC or urge you to see them when they are back in their districts.

When an important issue surfaces LeadingAge will ask you to engage in the following tactics:

- In-district meetings and events.
- Individualized emails.
- Phone calls.
- Letters to the editor.



# IN-DISTRICT MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Meetings with your elected officials provide an opportunity for you to discuss the work you do and how the issues they are working on impact your local community. You are their constituent.

Legislators come home regularly to their districts/states. During these “work periods,” they are focused on holding events and meeting with constituents. In the past, they engaged in town halls, so they could talk to many constituents at once. These events unfortunately have gotten much rowdier in recent years and many elected officials are avoiding them.

We urge LeadingAge advocates to look for opportunities for smaller meetings, such as “Coffee Chats with Congress,” where LeadingAge Advocacy Champions host a legislator for a tour and conversation at your community. We will let you know when a congressional work period is coming up to facilitate scheduling one of these events. We also have some great materials to use at [www.leadingage.org/coffeechats](http://www.leadingage.org/coffeechats)

Whether you talk with a legislator alone, in a small group, or at a town hall, it is important to be prepared. LeadingAge staff can help you with talking points, fact sheets, and the “ask” of the lawmaker, depending on what is happening in Congress at that time. Visit [leadingage.org/policy-positions](http://leadingage.org/policy-positions) for the most up to date fact sheets that you can share with your elected officials and their staff.

If you plan a meeting with a legislator and it involves others, it’s important to plan with the other participants to structure the meeting so that everyone knows their role, who is saying what, etc. Again, LeadingAge staff can help you think through these details, in addition to how to set up the meeting.

You can look up public events for your congressional representatives at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov).



# INDIVIDUALIZED EMAILS

Sending an email is an effective way you can use your voice to raise awareness about the issues that affect your organization and residents.

Here are the most important elements of an email to your legislator (and remember that during a specific issue campaign, LeadingAge will give you themes and talking points to include):

- Start by explaining that you are a constituent.
- Share your role within the community (and your affiliation with LeadingAge).
- Then talk about your “ask,” what you want the legislator to do (if there is a specific piece of legislation, include the bill number).
- Try to limit your email to one “ask.”
- Keep the email simple and short.
- Make it personal by including a sentence or two about how the issue will affect your community.
- Invite the member to visit your community for a tour and to chat with staff and residents.
- Include your email address, mailing address, and phone number so staff can contact you.

When Congress is in session, LeadingAge sends out Action Alerts via email. Action Alerts are notices that ask members to take action on a specific issue/bill. Visit <http://www.leadingage.org/grassroots> to see current Action Alerts.

In addition to sharing themes and talking points, LeadingAge will indicate when it is an important time to act, as well as update you on what happened on a particular vote.

## PHONE CALLS

Phone calls are important during a legislative issue campaign. It is extremely valuable to call the congressional office, share your story, and tell the legislator how they should vote on an upcoming bill.

When you call the congressional office, chances are that you will be talking to a staffer and they will record how you think the member of Congress should vote. When you call a legislator’s office, you may only have time to state that you are a constituent and your position on the bill (along with the bill number). They may ask you for your address so that they can mail you a written response.

Even though it will most likely be a quick conversation, every congressional office tallies the calls they get, so it is an effective tactic at key moments in a campaign.

LeadingAge will share the appropriate time during the campaign to call, along with the critical messages.

You can check with <http://www.leadingage.org/grassroots> to see if we currently have any call campaigns that you can help us on and make a quick phone call today!

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Another way to impact lawmakers is through the press, specifically by sending letters to the editor. Legislators and their staff monitor local and national outlets for media coverage, including the officials' name and relevant issues.

A letter to the editor (LTE) is a great way to educate readers about an issue and urge elected officials to support it. LTEs are a tool used to respond, in a timely fashion (within 10 days), to an article published by the paper. They are also short, usually 150-200 words.

Every news outlet has its own procedures and policies for LTEs. Some outlets, for instance, require writers to submit their letters via an online form; others accept submissions via email. That's why, before submitting one, it is essential to go online and research the guidelines published by the paper to which you are submitting. Start by searching for the "Opinion" section of the paper, then look for "Submit a Letter to the Editor." If you can't find instructions, try emailing your comments directly to the paper's "Opinions" editor. Contact information for most editorial staff is listed in the "About Us" or "Contact Us" section of a paper's website.

An LTE is an opportunity to inform the audience about an issue and to explain how that issue impacts you and the community. Use your personal story to highlight the issue's significance. If possible, show how your story relates to the larger community, and explain how legislation, funding, or political activity matters. Also, try to end the letter with a call to action -- a request or details on a proposed solution to the problem -- for readers.

Other tips:

- Include the headline, publication date, and author of the article to which your letter responds. Link to the article, if possible.
- Present a cohesive argument, backed by facts from credible sources. Editors often check information in a letter prior to publication. Use our resources at [leadingage.org/policy-positions](https://leadingage.org/policy-positions).
- Do not attack or insult other groups or people.
- Include your name, title or affiliation, as well as contact information where an editor can reach you if he or she has questions.
- If your letter is selected for publication, once it is live be sure to share the published piece with the audiences you hope to influence. Even if they have seen it on their own, bringing it to their attention can add to its impact and underscore your commitment to advocacy.
- Whenever you succeed in being published, let your LeadingAge staff colleagues know!



## Sample letter to the editor:

Dear Editor:

I am the executive director of Family Housing Management, a nonprofit provider of affordable housing for older adults with low incomes in Jacksonville, FL. I am writing in response to the proposal, covered in the story, ["article headline, publication date, by reporter name."] The Housing and Urban Development's proposal to increase rents for residents in affordable housing will cause significant hardship to the more than 200 older adult residents who call the 250 apartments in our buildings home. If enacted, many of our residents, whose monthly incomes are 50% of the median income for our area, may be forced to choose between spending less on medication or food in order to pay rent -- a stressful situation that may well result in possible decline in health and quality of life. Worse yet, they might be evicted from their homes. Many do not have other housing options. We can do better. [Look, for instance, at efforts in EXAMPLE]. We urge our elected officials, including [insert names], to take positive action: reject this proposal to ensure that our area's older adults can continue to live with dignity.

**Name**

**Title**

**Address**

**Daytime telephone number**

# SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a great way to connect with elected officials at the state and federal level. It gives you a unique way to share your story. We encourage you to use social media to talk about our policy priorities and use your pictures and stories to really highlight the issue. You can also use social media to:

- Follow lawmakers to know what they are saying about particular bills.
- Communicate with them.
- Let your personal and professional networks know where you stand on critical issues and encourage them to act.

Best of all, social media messages reach a wide audience and are easily shareable.

During big campaigns, LeadingAge will suggest hashtags, tweets, and Facebook messages. When you use existing hashtags that correspond to a bill, as well as the handle for the legislator you are trying to influence, more people will see your message. You can also always use **#leadingageadvocacy** to highlight your advocacy efforts on social media.

As a constituent, it is important to mention your organization is in the member of Congress' district/state. Every legislator is on social media and dedicates staff time to tracking mentions and engagement from the different platforms. While you may not receive a direct response from their account, the posts/tweets are having an impact.

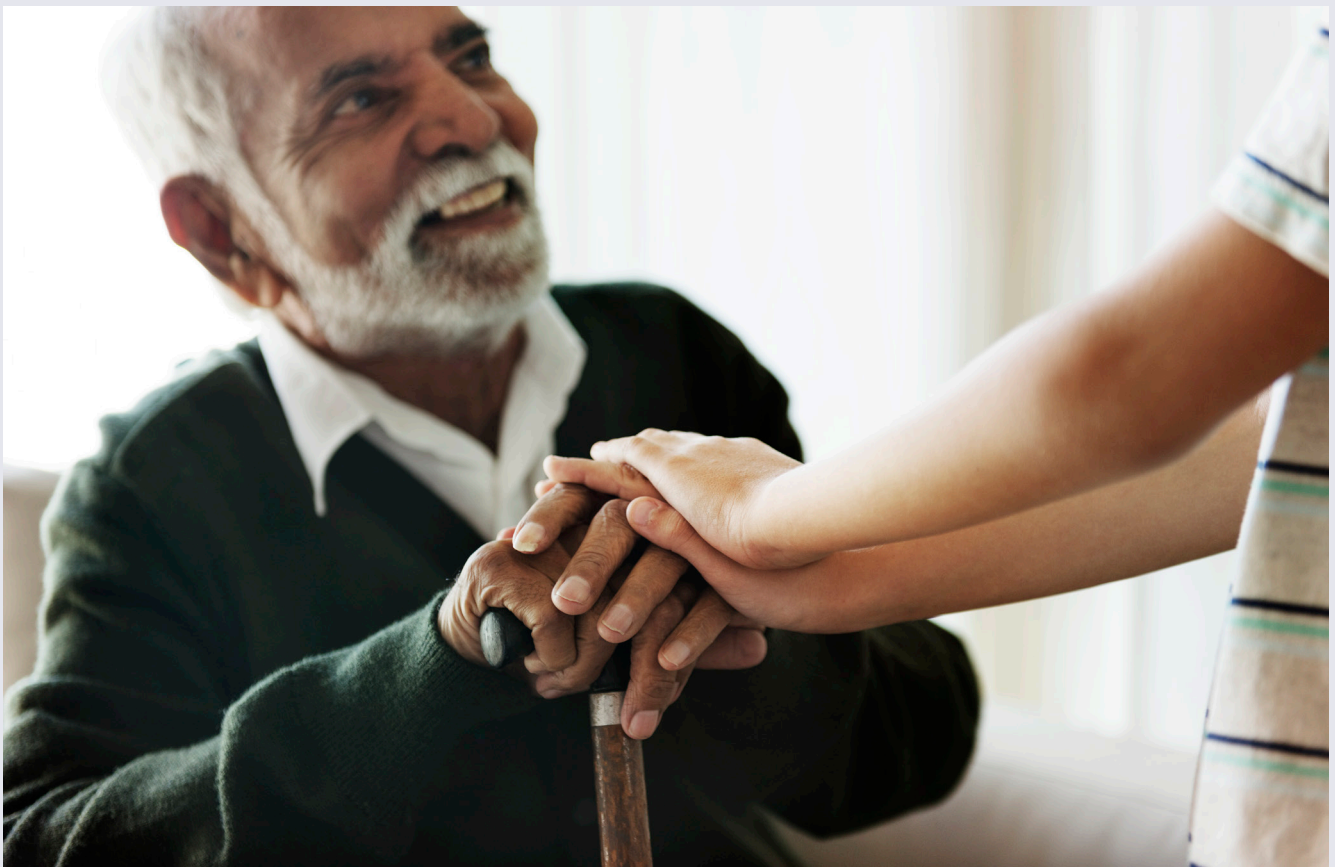
# TELLING YOUR STORY

The key element of every tactic in this toolkit is the personal story. It's important to understand why personal stories are so influential with policy makers. Legislators make it a high priority to keep in touch with their constituents. They set aside a substantial amount of time to meet with residents from their district or state. During any given week, they meet with dozens of constituents. The meetings that make the biggest impression on them are those where the constituent has shared a personal story and explained why the legislation they seek will make a difference to them. These constituents have an impact because they put a "face" on the issue.

Not surprisingly, these stories are likely to be remembered by legislators far longer than facts and figures.

The story connects the dots for the member: how a bill is hurting, or could help, a resident, and what the practical impact of the bill is for constituents in that district.

The more time an advocate spends thinking through their story and how to talk about it, the more effective it will be when the story is shared as part of an event or conversation.



# HOW TO FIND OUT ABOUT YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS?

There are many ways to find out about your members of Congress. Their individual congressional websites can be accessed through [house.gov](http://house.gov) and [senate.gov](http://senate.gov). But you can also search for them online to find out their latest news and upcoming events. Sign up to get their newsletter so you know when they are back home for a work period.



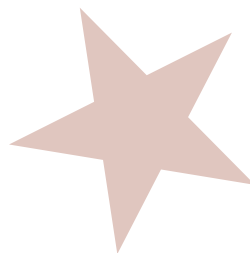
# WHO CAN I CONTACT

LeadingAge is very excited that you want to become an Advocacy Champion and join us in making positive change in your community through advocacy.

We want to know your great advocacy works in your community. Please use our simple report form to let us know who you met with and what you discussed. This form can be found at [www.leadingage.org/grassrootsform](http://www.leadingage.org/grassrootsform).

Please work with your LeadingAge state affiliate for help planning and thinking of advocacy at the local and state level. You can also contact Joe Franco, vice president of grassroots, and he will coordinate with other LeadingAge staff. You can contact him at: [jfranco@leadingage.org](mailto:jfranco@leadingage.org) or 202-508-9442

You can also visit our resources at [www.leadingage.org/grassroots](http://www.leadingage.org/grassroots) and become an active Advocacy Champion today.



# NOTES





The Trusted Voice for Aging

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