

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

COURT ROLE AND STRUCTURE



CHAPTER I – ADVOCACY

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is defined as giving aid to a cause or active support for a cause or position. For SGIM, it provides an opportunity to influence policy in an open and transparent manner and an effort to represent the views of membership by making their positions known to legislators, regulators, and other policymakers. Advocacy activities can be implemented on a local, regional, or national level, individually or with other members, or as part of formal or informal coalitions. The right to advocate, or petition the government, is enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution and is one of the most basic American rights essential to any functioning democracy.

What is Grassroots Advocacy and Why is it Important?

Grassroots advocacy is the process by which an organization activates its members – who are constituents of members of Congress – to contact their elected officials to influence the officials' views on an issue of importance to practices. Grassroots advocacy does not require any special skill or training and as a general internal medicine physician, you are the expert.

When engaging in grassroots advocacy, SGIM members use their expertise to shape public policy and provide oversight of laws, regulations, and policies adopted by the government. Effective advocacy makes crucial, policy-relevant information widely available to several key audiences that influence public policy.

Coalition Advocacy

Because we're stronger together!

Advocacy is enhanced by collaborating with others who feel enthusiastic about the same issues that you do, and the greater the number of advocates on one side of a particular issue, the greater are the chances of a favorable result. Coalition advocacy is often used to bring groups together to advocate for changes in legislation or regulations that affect their shared interests.

Formal and informal coalitions depend on cooperation from their members as they strive to expand their base. There must be a strategy developed to keep track of the duties, responsibilities and qualifications of each member or member organization. Leveraging coalition members' expertise and resources, coalition advocacy can take many forms, such as joint public statements, coordinated lobbying efforts, joint campaigns, and more.

SGIM participates in several formal and informal coalitions on a national level to help advance the Society's health policy agenda.

How to be an Effective Advocate

Being an effective advocate requires several key skills and strategies.

Get informed!

It's important to have a deep understanding of the issue you are advocating for, including its history, current status, and potential solutions. Additionally, you will need to identify your members of Congress and find out their contact information, biographies, and stances on various health policy issues. To learn about your members of Congress, follow them on social media and check out the information on their websites.

Communication is key!

You should be able to communicate your message clearly and persuasively, tailoring your approach to your audience and using evidence to support your arguments. SGIM can help you with this. Building strong relationships with stakeholders, including policymakers, community leaders, and other advocates, can also help you to gain support for your cause. It's important to be persistent and proactive, using a variety of tactics such as public speaking, social media campaigns, and grassroots organizing to generate awareness and action.

CHAPTER 2 – CIVICS 101

The United States Congress

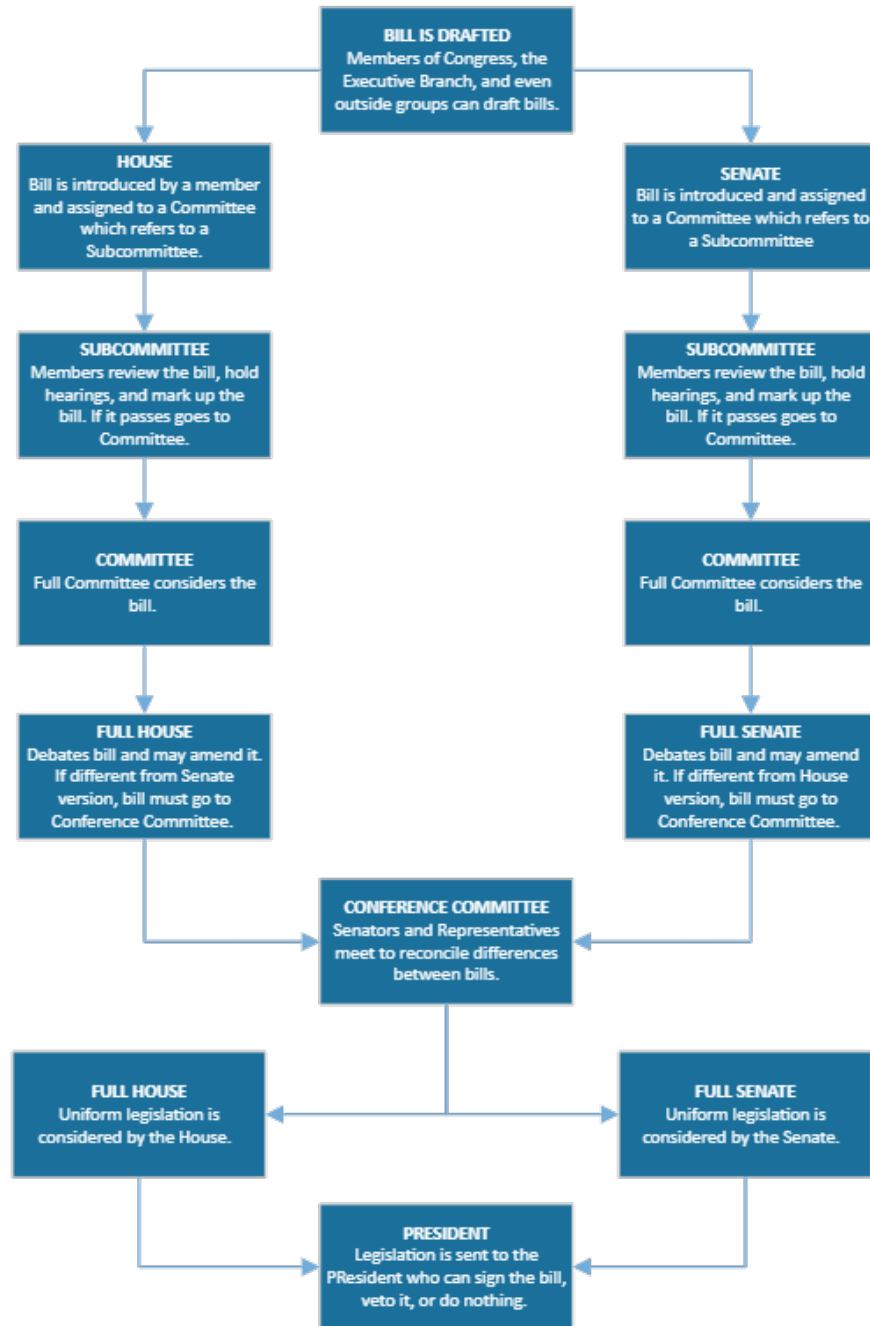
- Congress consists of two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives.
- The House has 435 members who are elected to two-year terms; the Senate has 100 members who serve staggered six-year terms.
- National elections are held every two years (in even numbered years) on the first Tuesday of November during which all 435 House members are up for reelection, and 33 members (one third) of the Senate are up for reelection.

Congressional Leadership

The two major political parties in the United States are the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, and members of Congress are typically affiliated with one of these parties. Members may be elected as Independents but customarily caucus with one of the two major parties. Additionally, each chamber has two groups: a majority party and a minority party. The party that holds the majority of seats is called the “majority” party, as opposed to the “minority” party which holds the minority of seats in the chamber. The leaders of Congress include the Speaker of the House, the House Majority Leader, the House Minority Leader, the Senate Majority Leader, and the Senate Minority Leader. These members play a critical role in shaping the political landscape and promoting their party's priorities and goals.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

The chief function of Congress is making laws and providing oversight. While Congress is in session, any member of Congress can introduce a bill. Below are the specific steps a bill goes through to become a law. However, bills may be enacted without going through all the steps in this diagram.



Types of Legislation

The key to deciphering the legislative process is in understanding the legislation is grouped into three main categories –

1. **Authorizing Legislation** – A bill that creates a new federal program, extends the life of an existing program, or repeals an existing law. Authorizing bills usually set a limit on the amount of funds that can be spent annually by a program over a period of three to five years. But it's important to remember that an authorizing bill only establishes the framework for a federal program – it does not provide funds to operate the program.
2. **Appropriations Legislation** – A bill that allocates funding for specific federal programs. Unlike authorizing legislation, which remains in effect for three or more years, an appropriations bill must be enacted into law every year. Each year, in fact, Congress must pass a series of 13 appropriations bills to keep the departments and agencies of the federal government operating.
3. **Entitlement Legislation** – A measure that guarantees a certain level of benefits to persons who meet eligibility requirements set by law, such as Medicare, Medicaid, and college student loan programs. Entitlement programs typically do not need to be reauthorized, nor do they require annual appropriations.

Budget and Appropriations Process

The budget and appropriations process governs how Congress funds various federal programs and operations. It is often complex and does not always follow the timeframe outlined below but it is important for stakeholders to understand in order to influence the process successfully.

Budget Process Timetable¹

On or Before:	Action to be completed:
First Monday in February	President submits his budget.
February 15	Congressional Budget Office submits report to Budget Committees.
Not later than 6 weeks after the President submits the budget.	Committees submit views and estimates to Budget Committees.
April 1	Senate Budget Committee reports concurrent resolution on the budget.
April 15	Congress adopts a budget resolution. If a budget resolution is not adopted, appropriations subcommittee allocations may be deemed to be in effect.
May through end of September	The House and Senate consider 13 appropriations bills—first in the subcommittees, then in the full appropriations committees, and finally on the floor. The House considers appropriations bills first as spending bills typically originate in this chamber.
October 1	New fiscal year begins.

¹ <https://budget.house.gov/about/budget-framework/time-table-budget-process/>

Relevant Congressional Committees for Issues on Health Care

House Committees

[House Energy and Commerce \(E&C\) Committee](#)

E&C has responsibility for food and drug safety and public health research. It oversees multiple cabinet-level Departments and independent agencies, including the Health and Human Services and the Food and Drug Administration.

Health Subcommittee

This subcommittee has jurisdiction over public health/quarantine; biomedical research; health information technology; public health insurance (Medicare, Medicaid) and private health insurance; medical malpractice and medical malpractice insurance; the regulation of food, drugs, and cosmetics; drug abuse; the Department of Health and Human Services; the National Institutes of Health (NIH); the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

[House Committee on Ways and Means](#)

The Committee on Ways and Means is the chief tax-writing committee in the House of Representatives and has jurisdiction over all Bills for raising Revenue. Specifically, revenue-related aspects of the Social Security system, Medicare, and social services programs are within Ways and Means' purview.

Health Subcommittee

This subcommittee jurisdiction includes bills and matters that relate to programs providing payments (from any source) for health care, health delivery systems, or health research.

[House Appropriations Committee](#)

The Committee writes the legislation that allocates federal funds to the numerous government agencies, departments, and organizations on an annual basis. Appropriations are limited to the levels set by a Budget Resolution, drafted by the Budget Committee. Subcommittees are tasked with drafting legislation to allocate funds to government agencies within their jurisdictions. These subcommittees are responsible for reviewing the President's budget request, hearing testimony from government officials, and drafting the spending plans for the coming fiscal year. Their work is passed on to the full Appropriations Committee, which may review and modify the bills and forward them to the full Senate for consideration. This Committee is only responsible for discretionary spending.

Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee

This subcommittee is responsible for developing the legislation that funds the Departments of Labor, HHS, and Education. Its jurisdiction includes setting the funding levels for the full spectrum of HHS agencies, including the NIH, the CDC, the Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality (AHRQ), and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

Senate Committees

Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee

The HELP Committee is the authorizing committee in the Senate for discretionary programs at the Department of Health and Human Services and has jurisdiction over any issue relating to biomedical research and development. There is no health subcommittee - any authorization or oversight legislation that falls in this category is reviewed by the full committee.

Senate Committee on Finance

The Finance Committee concerns itself with matters relating to taxation and other revenue measures generally, and those relating health programs under the Social Security Act, including Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and other health and human services programs financed by a specific tax or trust fund; and national social security.

Health Care Subcommittee

This subcommittee is charged with all taxation and revenue matters concerning health programs.

Senate Appropriations Committee

This Committee performs the same function as its counterpart in the House.

Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee

This subcommittee is responsible for developing the legislation that funds the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education. Its jurisdiction includes setting the funding levels for the full spectrum of HHS agencies, including the NIH, CDC, AHRQ, and HRSA.

CHAPTER 3 – ENGAGING WITH CONGRESS

Identifying your Representative in Congress

Before you begin communicating with your legislators, you must identify who represents you. To find your members of Congress, you can visit www.house.gov and enter your zip code or www.senate.gov and find your state.

Know the Role of Your Member

Though any member of Congress can introduce a bill, few can ensure that the bill gets passed or even gets a hearing in a Committee. Identify which (if any) of your members sit on important committees that address health care issues.

Additionally, do your homework! Look at your member's website or social media page to learn more about their priorities and where they stand on issues relevant to SGIM's advocacy goals.

How to Engage with Members of Congress

It is not only your right, but also your obligation, to let elected officials know how you feel about important issues. It is your responsibility to speak out on matters that affect you. Communication with members of Congress is the primary weapon in an advocate's legislative arsenal. Grassroots communication – through letters, emails, faxes, phone calls and personal visits produce results in Congress. If a member is undecided about how to vote on an issue, he or she often will look to how many of their constituents have weighed in on that issue. Or pressure from their home district may cause them to temper their strong opposition/support or even cause them to abstain from taking a position on that particular issue.

Grassroots communication, spontaneous or organized, is a member's political and legislative barometer of his or her constituents' opinions and is rarely ignored.

- Phone - If you know who your members are you may call (202) 224-3121 for the U.S. Capitol switchboard operator.
- Email - Most members of Congress have an email form on their website, which you can access by visiting the individual member's website and click on the "contact" tab.
- In-Person - In-person meetings are the most effective way of letting a public official know about you, your priorities, and SGIM. Given a legislator's busy schedule, meetings are sometimes difficult to arrange; however, members will typically do what they can to meet with their constituents. When their schedule does not allow it, members will arrange for their appropriate staff member to meet with constituents in their place. Do not pass up the opportunity to meet with congressional staff as they have significant influence over the course and content of legislation.
- Virtual – Virtual meetings are also an effective way to meet with a public official if you are unable to travel to Washington, DC. Members have the appropriate methods for arranging meetings with constituents over the phone or on Zoom or another telecommunications platform.

Communicating via Social Media

Using social media for advocacy can be a powerful tool to raise awareness, mobilize people, and influence decision-makers. Here are steps you can follow to use social media for advocacy:

- Define your advocacy goal: Before you start using social media for advocacy, you need to define your advocacy goal. What is the change you want to see? Who are the decision-makers you want to influence? What actions do you want your audience to take?
- Identify your target audience: Who do you want to reach with your advocacy message? Who are the people who are most likely to support your cause or take action?
- Choose the right social media platforms: Different social media platforms have different audiences and features. Choose platforms that are most suitable for your target audience and advocacy message. Some popular social media platforms for advocacy include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube.
- Develop a social media strategy: Develop a strategy that aligns with your advocacy goal and target audience.
- Create compelling content: Your content should be informative, engaging, and shareable. Use links, images, and videos to make your content more appealing. You can also use hashtags to make it easier for people to find and share your content.

Social media is just one way to advocate! To be most effective, SGIM members should combine social media with other advocacy tactics, such as grassroots, lobbying, and coalition building.

Advocacy tips and tricks

SGIM members are encouraged to engage with their elected representatives and advocate for their health policy goals. Below are tips for successful engagement.

- Be prepared and on time for your meeting.
- Clearly articulate your points.
- Bring a concise set of materials with you to leave behind.
- Don't forget your asks.
- Share your personal story.
- Be polite and say thank you.
- Share your feedback and experience with SGIM.

CHAPTER 4 – TAKE ACTION

SGIM's advocacy promotes and supports policies that improve patient care, strengthen education and training, and promote researchers and their research in general internal medicine. We cannot achieve these goals without your help. You are in a unique position to put a face on a problem; to tell your elected officials how the policies they pass judgment on are affecting you, your work, and your patients.

We wish you good luck in your advocacy endeavors and all the best as you continue this journey!

GLOSSARY

Act - The term for legislation that has been passed by Congress and signed into law by the President.

Amendment - The proposal of a member of Congress to alter the wording of a bill being considered by a subcommittee, committee, or on the House or Senate floor. Amendments can also be offered to add or delete entire sections of a bill, and even to substitute all the language in a bill.

Appropriation - Legislation that directs the spending of funds from the federal treasury for a specific purpose, e.g., funding for the Department of Health and Human Services. By custom, an appropriations bill originates in the House, where it is assigned an H.R. number (e.g., H.R. 5027) until it becomes law or is vetoed by the President. Typically, each appropriations bill includes funding for several hundred federal programs.

Authorization - A law creating a new federal program or extending the life of an existing program. An authorization establishes the framework for operating a federal program, and sets the maximum amount of funds that can be given to a program for a period of 3 to 5 years.

Bill - A proposed law introduced by a member(s) of the House or Senate.

Budget - The document the President sends to Congress each year outlining federal expenditures and revenues for the upcoming fiscal year. The President's budget is usually submitted to Congress in early February.

Budget Resolution - Legislation passed by Congress each year, which sets overall limits on spending and revenues. Congressional committees use the budget resolution as a

guide for allocating funds to specific federal programs. The budget resolution does not require the President's approval.

Capitol Hill - The area encompassing the U.S. Capitol, and the House and Senate office buildings (aka, the Hill).

Chamber - "Chamber" refers to the two bodies that make up Congress, the House and Senate.

Chief of Staff - The second highest ranking person in the office after the Member; responsible for office operations and evaluating political outcomes of various legislative actions.

Conference - A meeting between House and Senate members to reconcile differences between bills passed by their respective chambers of Congress. Once a compromise has been ironed out, a conference report is issued and voted on by the full House and Senate. The measure is then sent to the President for approval.

Congressional District - A geographical area within a state from which a Member of the House of Representatives is elected and they represent in Congress. There are 435 Congressional districts.

Continuing Resolution - An emergency appropriations bill providing funding for federal agencies whose regular appropriations bills have not been signed into law before the end of the federal government's fiscal year (September 30).

Entitlement - A federal program that guarantees a certain level of benefits to persons who meet requirements set by law, such as Social Security and unemployment benefits. Congress and the President generally have little discretion over spending by these programs.

Executive Branch - One of the three branches of government, charged with “executing the law.” The President oversees the executive branch, and it is made up of numerous agencies and departments including Health and Human Services.

Executive Order - A Presidential directive with the force of law that does not need Congressional approval.

Filibuster - Term used for an extended debate in the Senate that prevents a vote. Senate rules contain no motion to force a vote. A vote occurs only once the debate ends by cloture.

Fiscal Year - For the federal government, the fiscal year runs from October 1 through September 30.

Hearings - Committee meetings where testimony is taken from witnesses representing government agencies, private sector organizations, and the public. Most congressional hearings are open to the public. Hearings may be held in Washington, D.C. or in local communities.

Legislative Assistant - Offices have multiple LAs who each handle a portfolio of issues; LAs take meetings, draft legislation, and work with the LD to advise the Member on legislation.

Legislative Director - Monitors the legislative schedule, works with the Chief of Staff to develop priorities, advises on legislation, develops legislation, and oversees staff.

Mark-Up - A subcommittee or committee meeting for the purpose of writing legislation. Once completed, the measure is ready for debate on the floor of the House or Senate.

Omnibus Bill - A large measure that packages together several bills into one or combines diverse subjects into a single bill. Ex: combined appropriations bills and reconciliation bills.

President’s Budget - The budget document sent to Congress each year by the Administration, usually the first week of February. It estimates federal receipts and spending, and recommends appropriation levels and outlines the Administration’s priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

Public Law - A bill after it has been passed by the House and Senate and subsequently signed by the President.

Reconciliation bill - Legislation that contains changes (usually spending cuts) to existing laws to conform - or reconcile - with policies adopted in the budget resolution.

Recess - A temporary break in the session for a short period of time within the same day. Recess also refers to longer breaks over several days, such as holiday periods, which are approved by vote. Senators and Representatives usually travel home during recess to conduct business with local constituents.

Rescission - The act of canceling appropriations already enacted into law.

Standing Committee - A committee that is permanently established by House and Senate rules. Standing committees are empowered to prepare and review legislation. (As opposed to select committees, which serve only to advise Congress on a limited range of issues.)

Veto - The President’s formal disapproval of legislation passed by Congress. When Congress is in session, the President must veto a bill within 10 days after receiving it from Congress, otherwise it becomes law without his approval. A bill can become law after a Presidential veto if two-thirds of Congress votes to override the veto.