# CHILDREN'S CARDIOMYOPATHY FOUNDATION

## Top Ten Tips for Meeting with Members of Congress and their Staff

1. **Prepare and be on time.** Like healthcare professionals, members of Congress and their staff are very busy and often have to be in more than one place at a time. Be respectful of their time by giving yourself plenty of time to go through security, find your way to the office, and announce yourself to the receptionist. If you will be attending in a group, discuss with your colleagues in advance what you will be covering in the meeting. Be sure to select a primary spokesperson and determine who in the group will raise which points and requests. You should be clear about your roles and who will cover the different topics in the meeting. Open by thanking the member/staffer for his or her time. Be sure that everyone in the group identifies herself/himself – first and last name and connection to cardiomyopathy – and if you are a constituent, provide some context about where you live/work in the district/state. If the member/staffer has been helpful in the past or has taken action that you appreciate, be sure to say "thank you" up front. Prior to your meeting with the member/staffer**,** it is best to get a sense of what matters currently are pending before the Congress, and the committee(s) on which the member sits. This information is available on the Members' websites (www.house.gov and www.senate.gov).

2. **Be brief and clear**, as you typically will have only 10–25 minutes for the entire meeting. To ensure that you "stay on message," talking points for major issues of interest to CCF are included on the advocacy priorities section of the CCF website. Anticipate the kinds of questions you may be asked from both supporters and opponents. Do your best to be prepared to answer such questions in the meeting. If you do not know the answer, acknowledge that, and indicate that you will follow-up later (and remember to do so). Do not assume that the member/staffer is very knowledgeable about cardiomyopathy – be sure to provide them with some background.

3. **Provide a personal story or real-life illustration** of the problem, as personal stories are easier to remember and are more compelling than statistics. As necessary, briefly cite evidence or statistics to support your position, particularly any local, regional, or state data. However, be sure not to overwhelm the policymaker or staffer with too many statistics or references to studies (this kind of information will be in the materials you leave behind or can be sent with your thank-you note). Be concise and honest about the issue(s) and the solution(s). Make clear the relevance of the issue(s) to their constituents.

4. **Be polite and listen carefully** to the policymakers' or staffers' views and comments. Even if you disagree, it is important to be courteous. Be flexible and consider the opposing view. Do not to be argumentative or threatening. You may agree to disagree on an issue today and find that you can agree and work together on another matter tomorrow. Much of health policy advocacy is about building and maintaining relationships.

5. **Make sure to get a response – in a nice way.** Ask directly, and politely, for the policymaker's views and position on the issue. Do not let the policymaker or staffer distract you with other issues (gently steer the conversation back to your issue). Stay on message and the topic as politely as possible. It is your Constitutional right to "petition Congress for redress of grievances" – so take this opportunity to do what you can to get a commitment from the member to take action on your request(s). However, if the member truly is undecided or the staffer is not familiar with the member's position on the issue, do not force a response. Reiterate your interest in knowing the member's position, offer to answer any additional questions/provide additional information, and request a follow-up letter once a decision has been made on your request.

6. **Bring a concise set of materials with you to leave behind.** However, do not hand over the materials until the close of the meeting, or the member/staffer may choose to start reading the material and only listen to you with one ear. Materials for major issues of interest to CCF are available in the advocacy priorities section of the CCF website and may be printed and left behind during meetings. Early in the meeting indicate that you have materials to leave on the topic(s).

7. **Leave your contact information.** Leaving a business card with your information on it is appropriate. Be sure to get a business card from the member/staffer so that you know how to reach them. e sure to ask the member/staffer their preferred mode of communication (e.g. e-mail, faxes, voicemail/phone).

8. **Summarize your requests of the Member/office** and any responses the member/staffer have given to ensure you are clear on where they stand on the issues. Summarize the member's/staffer's requests and indicate how you plan to respond. Express thanks and appreciation for their time, interest, and courtesy. Ask politely for a good day in the next week to 10 days for you to follow up on your request(s).

9. **Report back to CCF staff** so others can follow-up with the office with additional information and reinforce the message(s) you delivered. The main advocacy page of CCF's website has a report back form that you can fill out and submit to CCF staff.

10. **Follow-up with a thank you note** to the member/staffer referencing the date of your meeting, who was in attendance, and the issues you discussed. Your follow-up letter should express appreciation for the time and consideration extended to you during your meeting, reiterate your request(s), and ask for a written response from the office. Be sure to call/e-mail/write with answers or information the member/staffer requested. Be sure to keep in touch with the member/staffer to maintain and strengthen the relationship and make yourself available as a local resource on issues related to pediatric cardiomyopathy. There are times when you and an elected official will have to "agree to disagree" but over time, you also may find that the policymaker may be supportive and helpful on other matters. Great ways to keep in touch are sending an article of interest from the local paper, or inviting the member/staffer to attend a relevant local event.