

Advocacy 101: Beginners, Start Here!

Pre-Conference Session
June 30, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Cullen Ryan, Community Housing of Maine, Executive Director

John Threlkeld, National Alliance to End Homelessness,
lobbyist

Ken Williamson, National Alliance to End Homelessness,
Program and Policy Analyst

Samantha Wood, National Alliance to End Homelessness,
Senior Field Organizer

Who's in the room?

Who has lobbied/advocated before on homelessness?

Who has lobbied/advocated before on homelessness and thought the effort was worthwhile?

Who has lobbied/advocated before on homelessness but didn't think their time was well-spent?

Who wants to be a better lobbyist/advocate on homelessness issues?

Who is skeptical that any good can be accomplished from lobbying/advocating on homelessness?



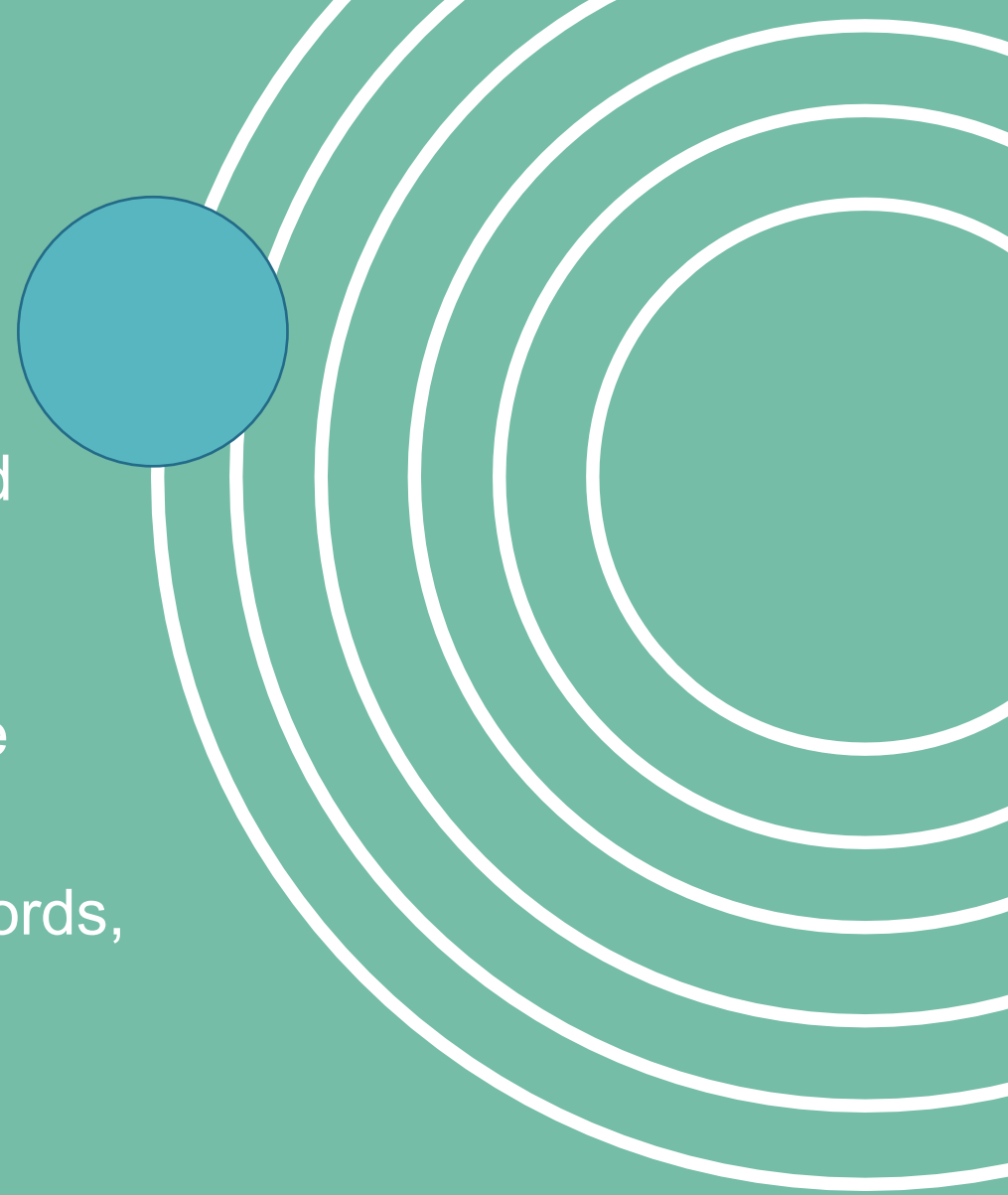
Agenda

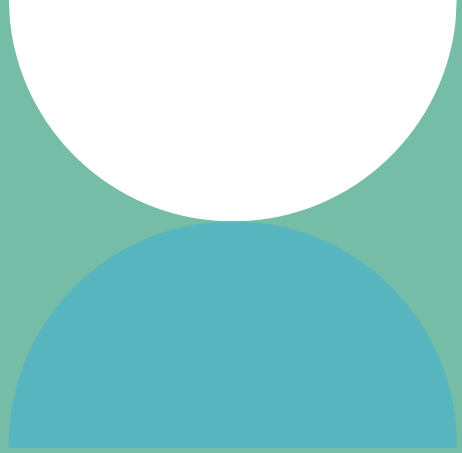
1. An introduction to the basics of the legislative process. And then a break.
2. Practical advice on how to lobby your lawmakers. With a break in between.



Why should we bother to lobby/advocate?

1. Nobody knows more about the resources and rules we need to reduce and prevent homelessness.
2. If you don't lobby/advocate, the wrong people surely will.
3. Federal funding is often zero sum; in other words, your funding will be spent on something else.
4. "Isn't lobbying what NAEH is supposed to be doing?"





Who are your lawmakers?

(In the 50 states)



Who are your lawmakers?

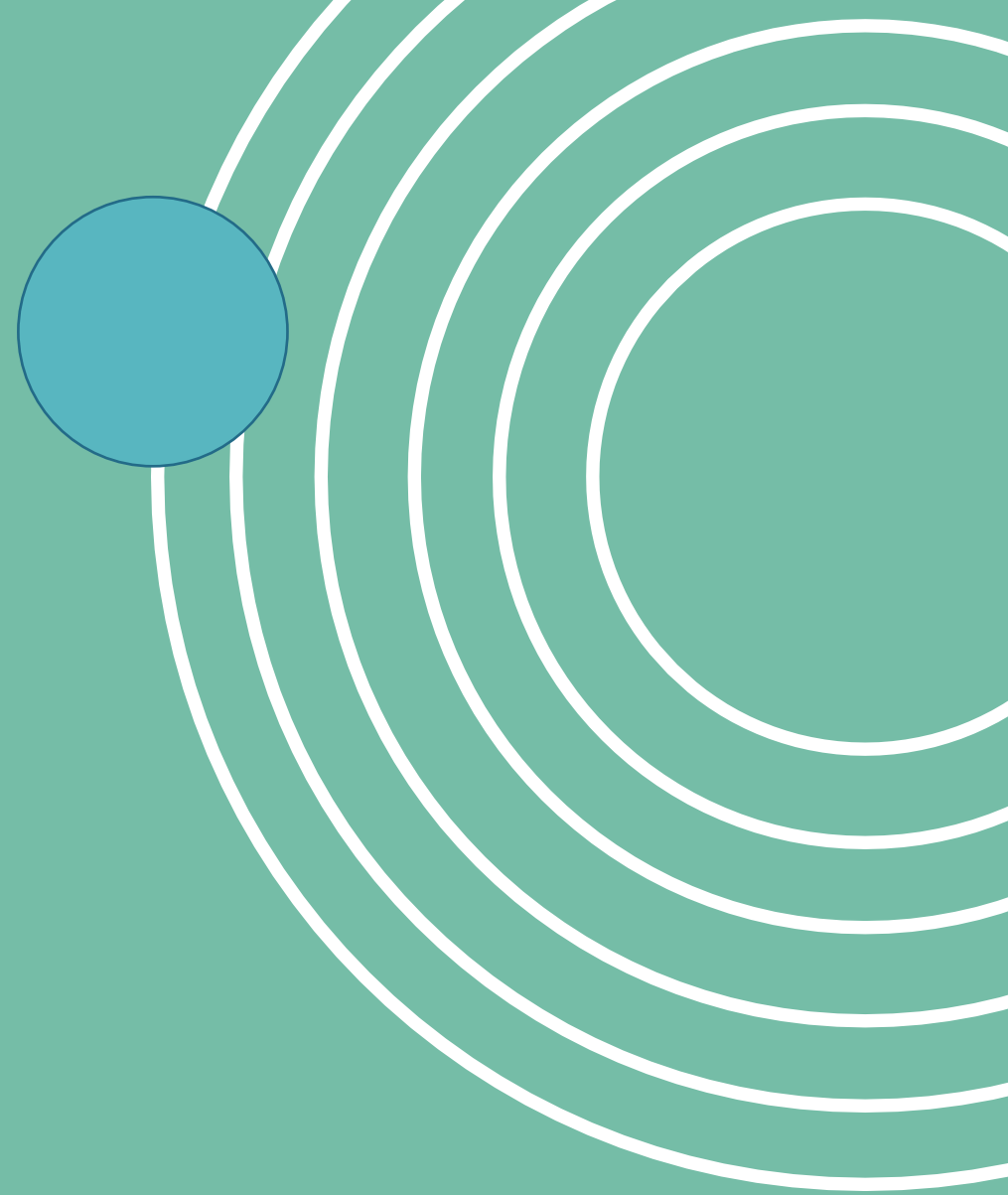
Representative (only one, but think broadly)

- in your service area,
- where you live, and
- where your colleagues live

<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>

Senators (two)

<https://www.congress.gov/>



Do your lawmakers serve on relevant committees?

House Financial Services Committee

Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee

House and Senate Appropriations Committees, particularly the Transportation-Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations Subcommittees



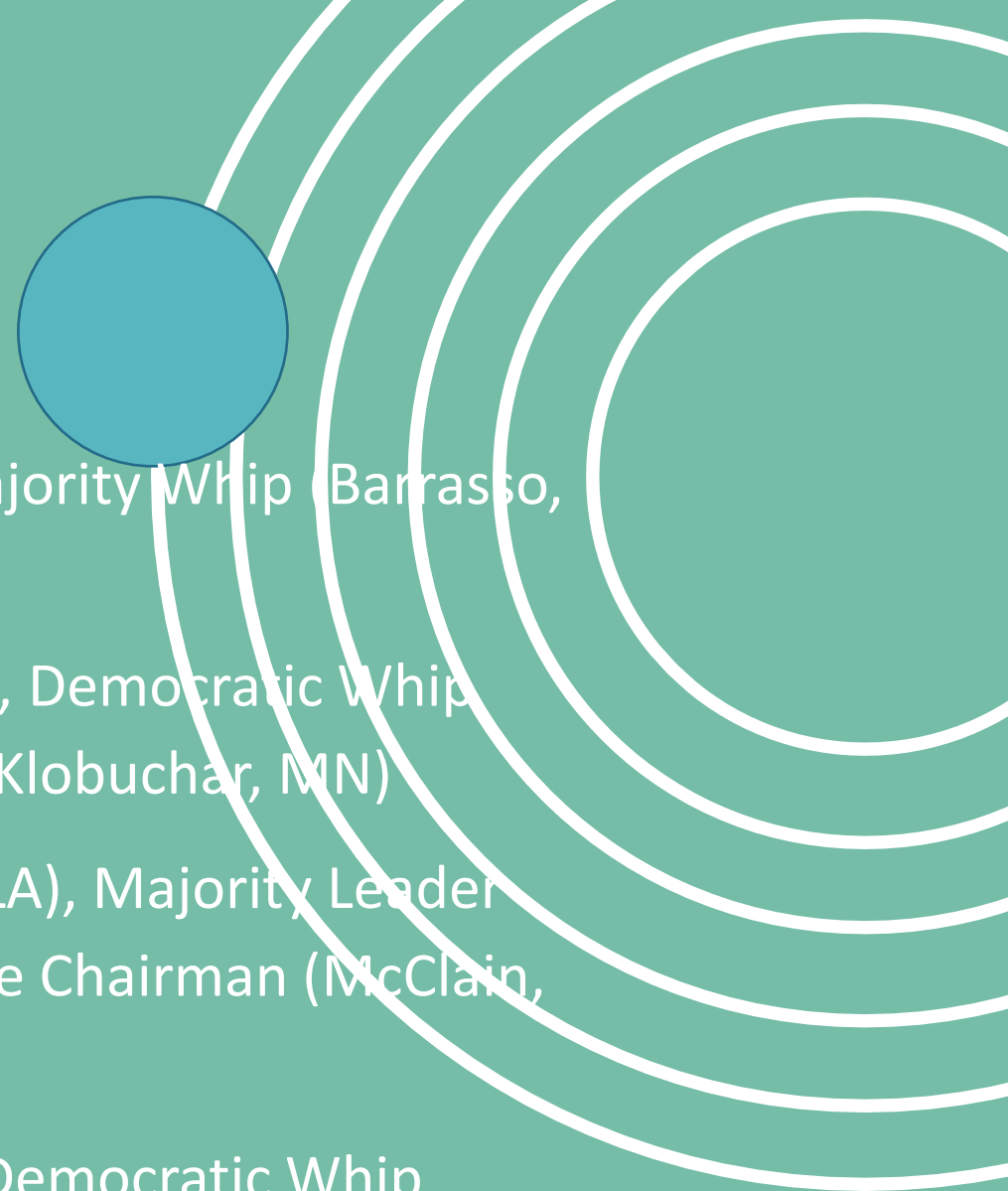
Are your lawmakers in leadership positions?

Senate Republicans: Majority Leader (Thune, SD), Majority Whip (Barrasso, WY), Conference Chair (Cotton, AR)

Senate Democrats: Democratic Leader (Schumer, NY), Democratic Whip (Durbin, IL), Chair of Steering and Policy Committee (Klobuchar, MN)

House Republicans: Speaker of the House (Johnson, LA), Majority Leader (Scalise, LA), Majority Whip (Emmer, MN), Conference Chairman (McClain, MI), Policy Committee Chairman (Hern, OK)

House Democrats: Democratic Leader (Jeffries, NY), Democratic Whip (Clark, MA), Democratic Caucus Chair (Aguilar, CA), Democratic Caucus Vice-Chair (Lieu, CA), Assistant Democratic Leader (Neguse, CO)



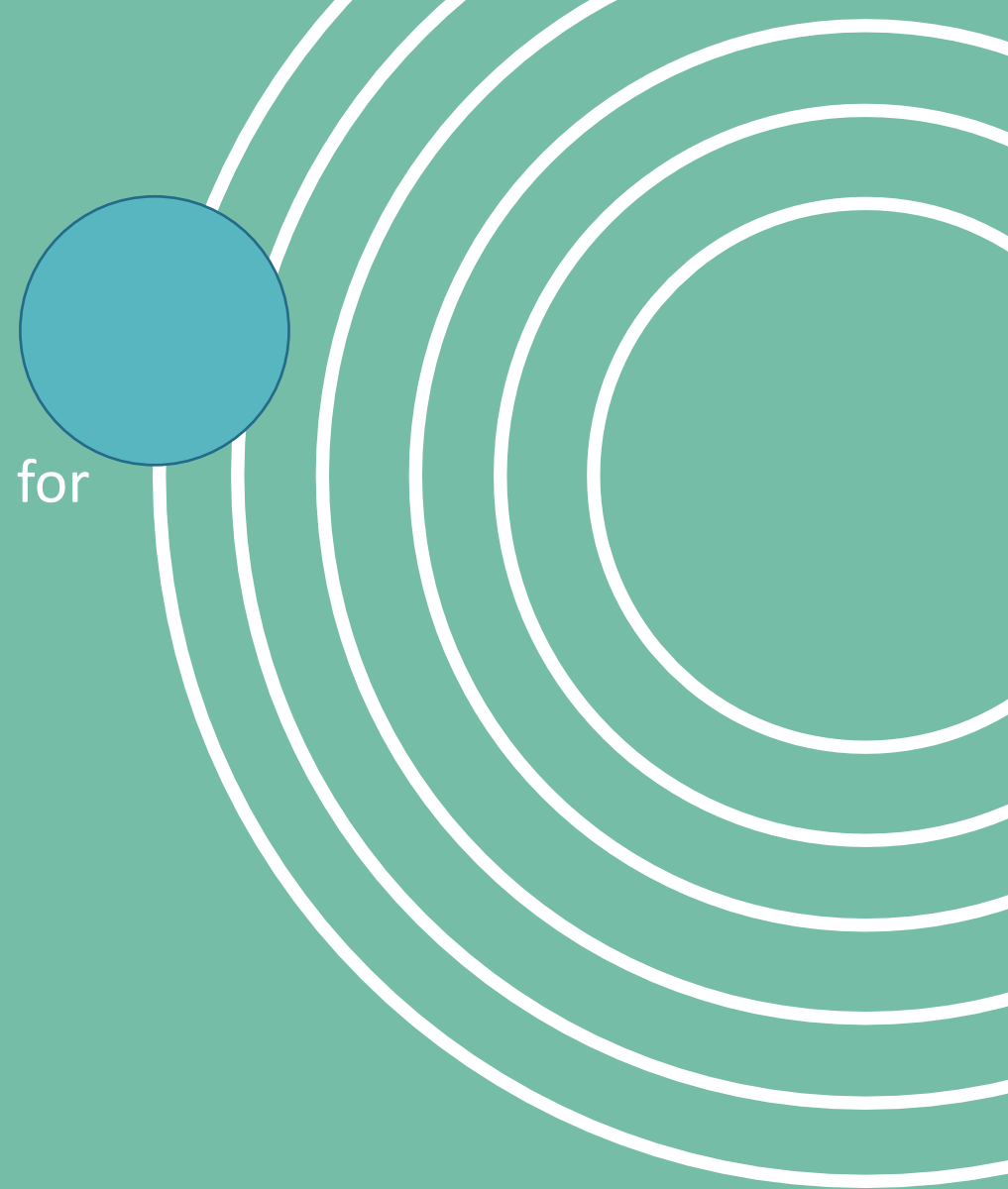
Appropriators and Authorizers

Who are our appropriators (determine funding levels for housing and homelessness programs)?

Senate Transportation-Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations Subcommittee

House Transportation-Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations Subcommittee

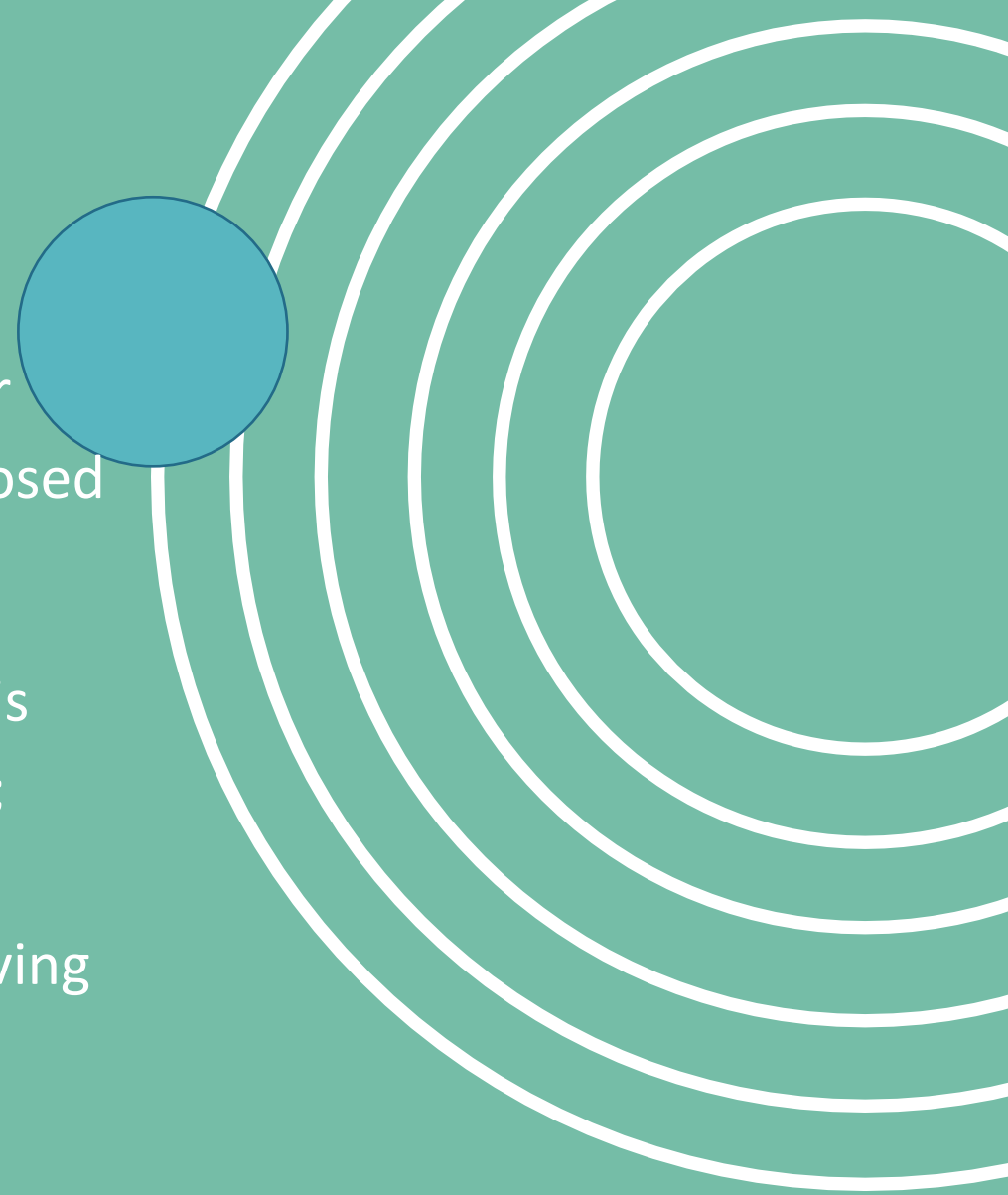
Who are our authorizers (establish housing and homelessness programs and the rules which govern those programs)?



Hearings

At a hearing, the committee invites witnesses to offer their opinions and expertise and answer questions posed by committee members.

Hearings are good indicators of what the committee is interested in from policy and/or political standpoints; legislation is sometimes explicitly considered, and hearings are often used to lay the foundation for moving certain bills forward.



Mark ups

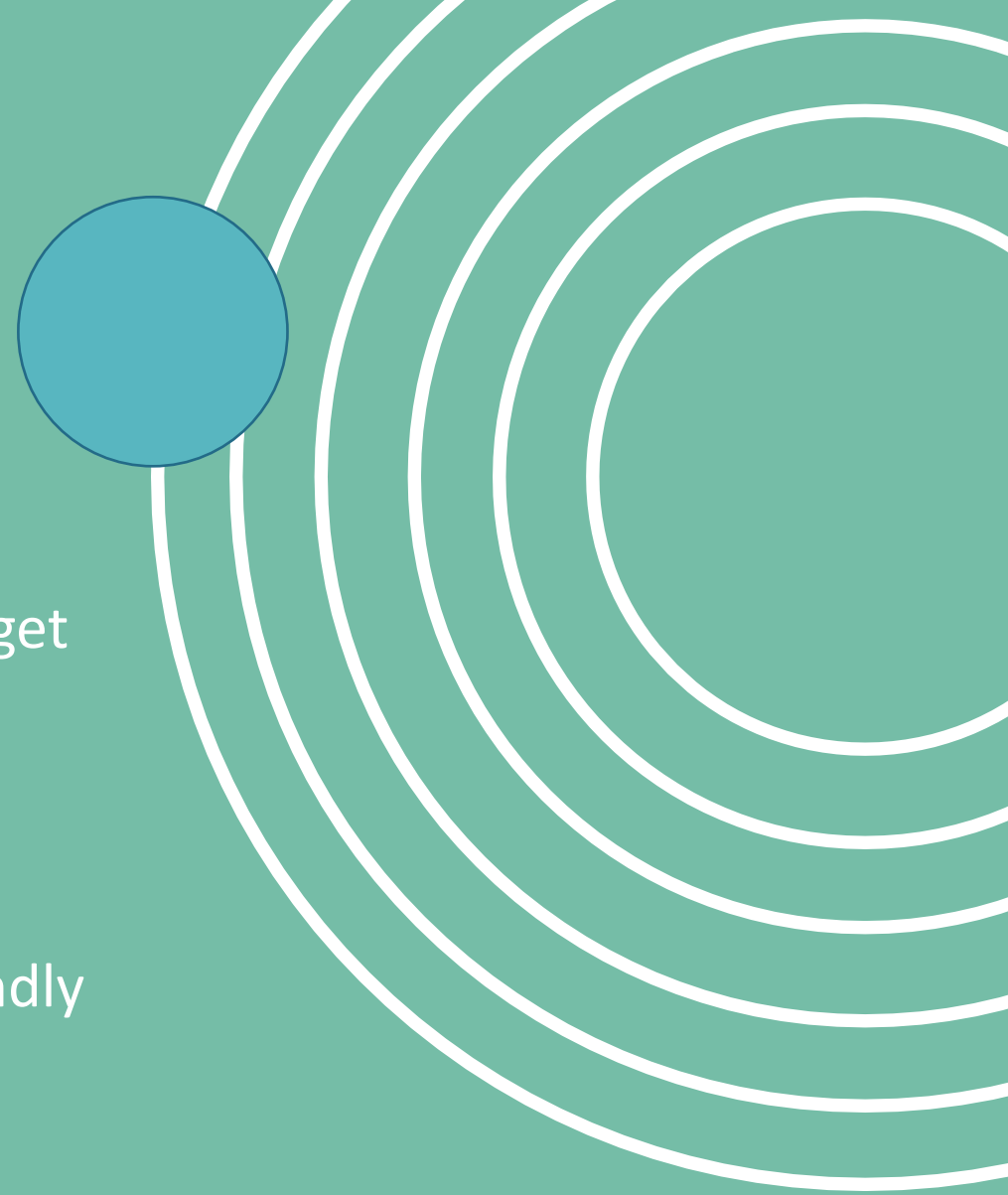
At a mark up, members of a committee or a subcommittee formally consider legislation.

Many bills get introduced, but very few bills actually get marked up.

Sometimes, a bill is approved without amendment.

Other times, a bill is subjected to friendly and unfriendly amendments.

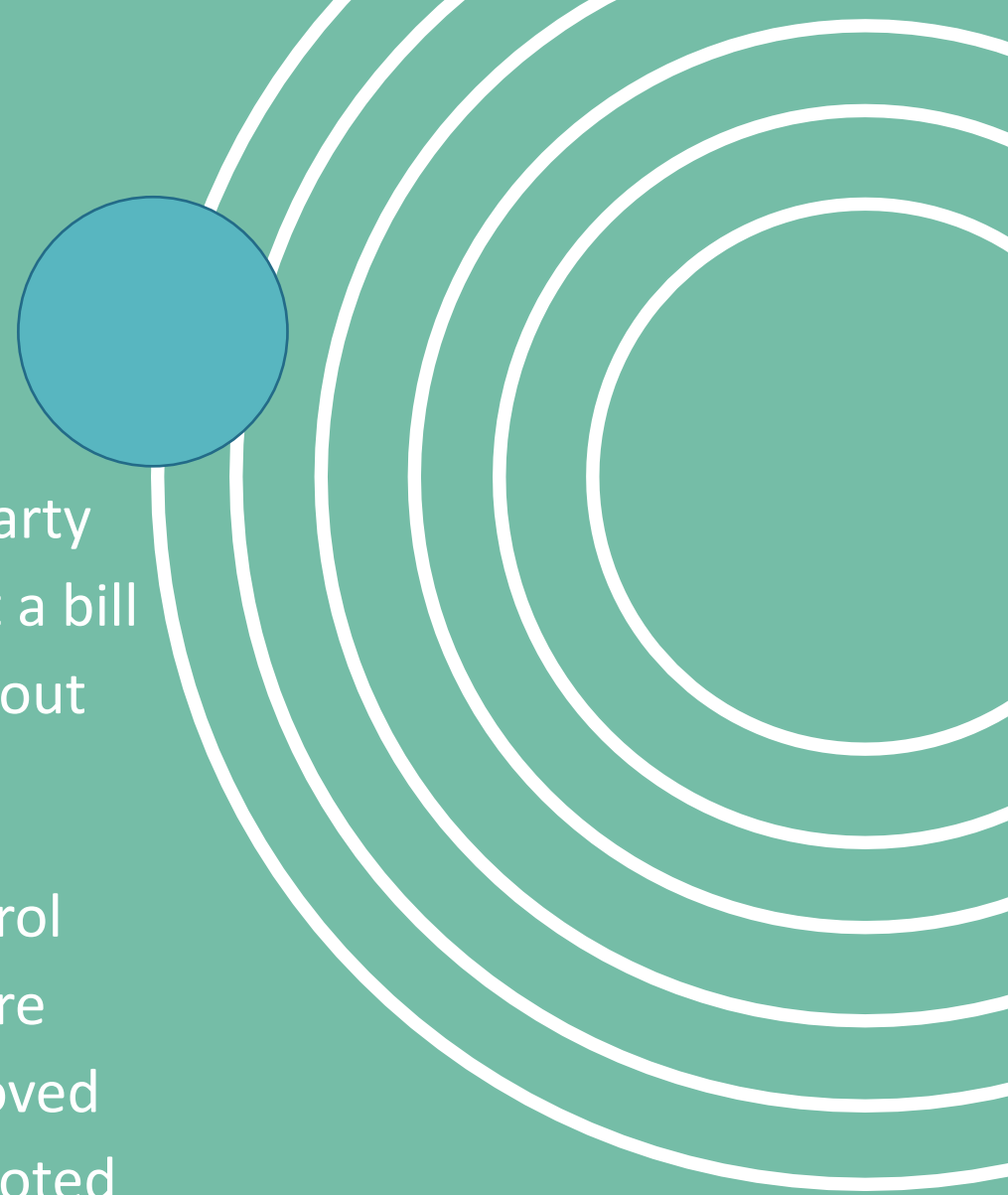
Bills that are approved can be sent to the floor for approval by the whole House or the whole Senate.



Floor consideration

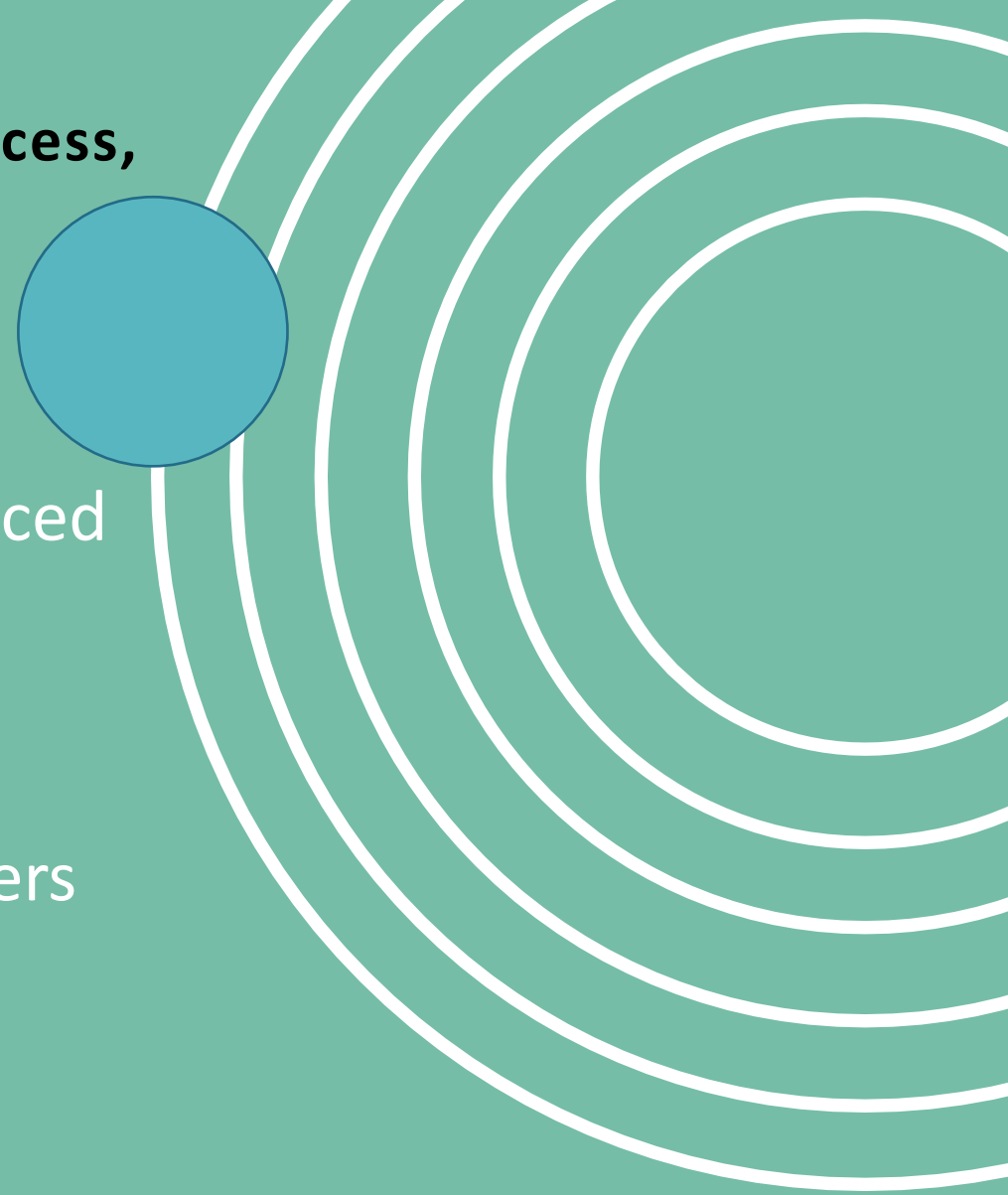
In the House floor consideration of legislation and amendments to legislation is very organized by the party in power and its Rules Committee. It is very rare that a bill or amendment is considered on the House floor without the approval of the party in power.

In the Senate, there are far fewer votes and less control over what amendments are offered and when they are voted on. Most bills which pass the Senate are approved by unanimous consent, i.e., they are never formally voted on.



How do lawmakers influence the legislative process, i.e., what can we ask lawmakers to do for us?

1. Introduce legislation: Most bills are introduced but never heard from again.
2. Cosponsor legislation: Sometimes, lawmakers so strongly support a bill that they literally associate their name with the legislation through co-sponsorship



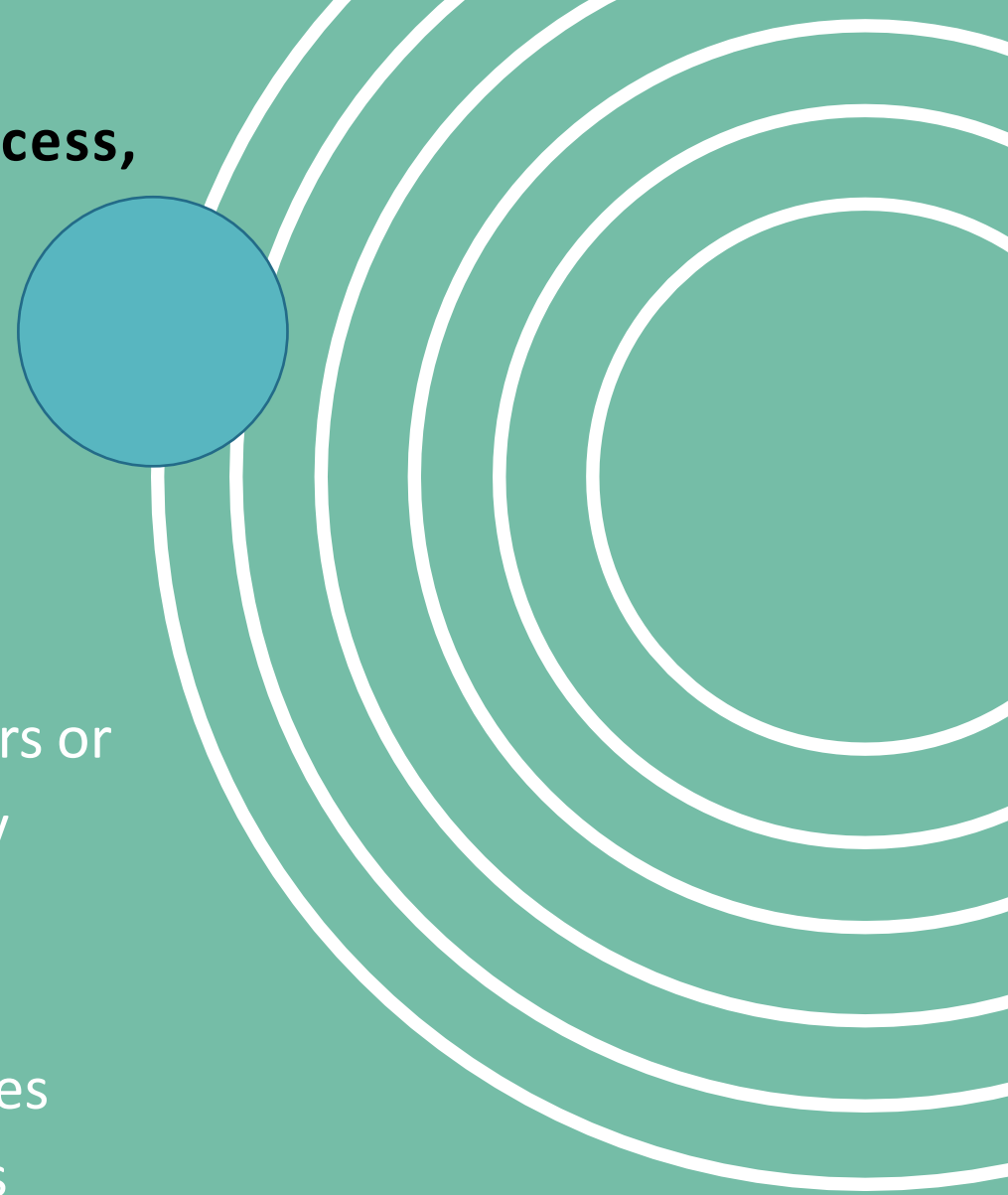
How do lawmakers influence the legislative process, i.e., what can we ask lawmakers to do for us?

3. Sign-On Letters: These are letters sent to Congressional committees or executive branch agencies either out of concern or in support.

- A House letter led by Rep. Peters to HUD asking for prompt provision of FY24 CoC funding (70)
- A House letter led by Rep. Moore to the House Transportation-HUD Appropriations Subcommittee in support of a robust funding increase for homeless services (141)
- A Senate letter led by Senator Reed to the Senate Transportation-HUD Appropriations Subcommittee in support of robust funding increases for homeless services and housing vouchers (42)
- A bicameral letter in support of maintaining funding for emergency housing vouchers (103)

How do lawmakers influence the legislative process, i.e., what can we ask lawmakers to do for us?

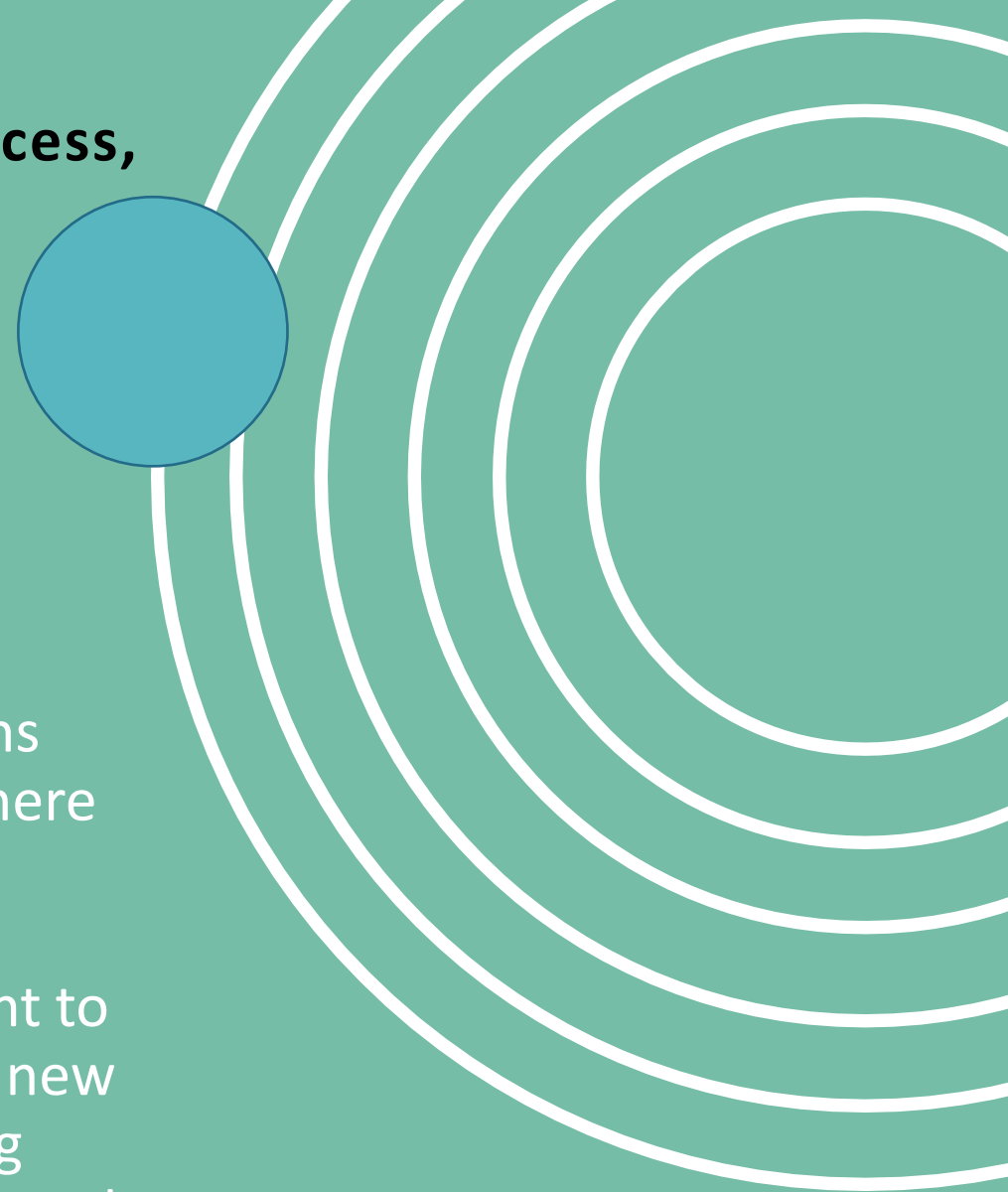
4. Private conversations and correspondence
5. Letters to agencies
6. Ask questions of agency officials at hearings
7. Report language: Explains provisions to lawmakers or communicates to federal agencies supplementary information and an explanation of the measure's legislative intent, which often includes a range of directives to the agency. This report language does not have the force of legislative language, but it is taken seriously by the agency.



How do lawmakers influence the legislative process, i.e., what can we ask lawmakers to do for us?

Example of report language:

“The Committee recognizes that although there are currently record-high Federal resources dedicated to addressing homelessness, including in this recommendation, the number of unhoused Americans has increased over the past ten years. In particular, there has been a rapid growth in the number of public encampments and individuals with substance use disorders. The Committee **encourages** the Department to evaluate the efficacy of current policies and consider new policies that lead toward better outcomes, prioritizing programs that require treatment for substance abuse and mental health, accountability, and a path to self-sufficiency.”



How do lawmakers influence the legislative process, i.e., what can we ask lawmakers to do for us?

8. Bill language

HOMELESS ASSISTANCE GRANTS

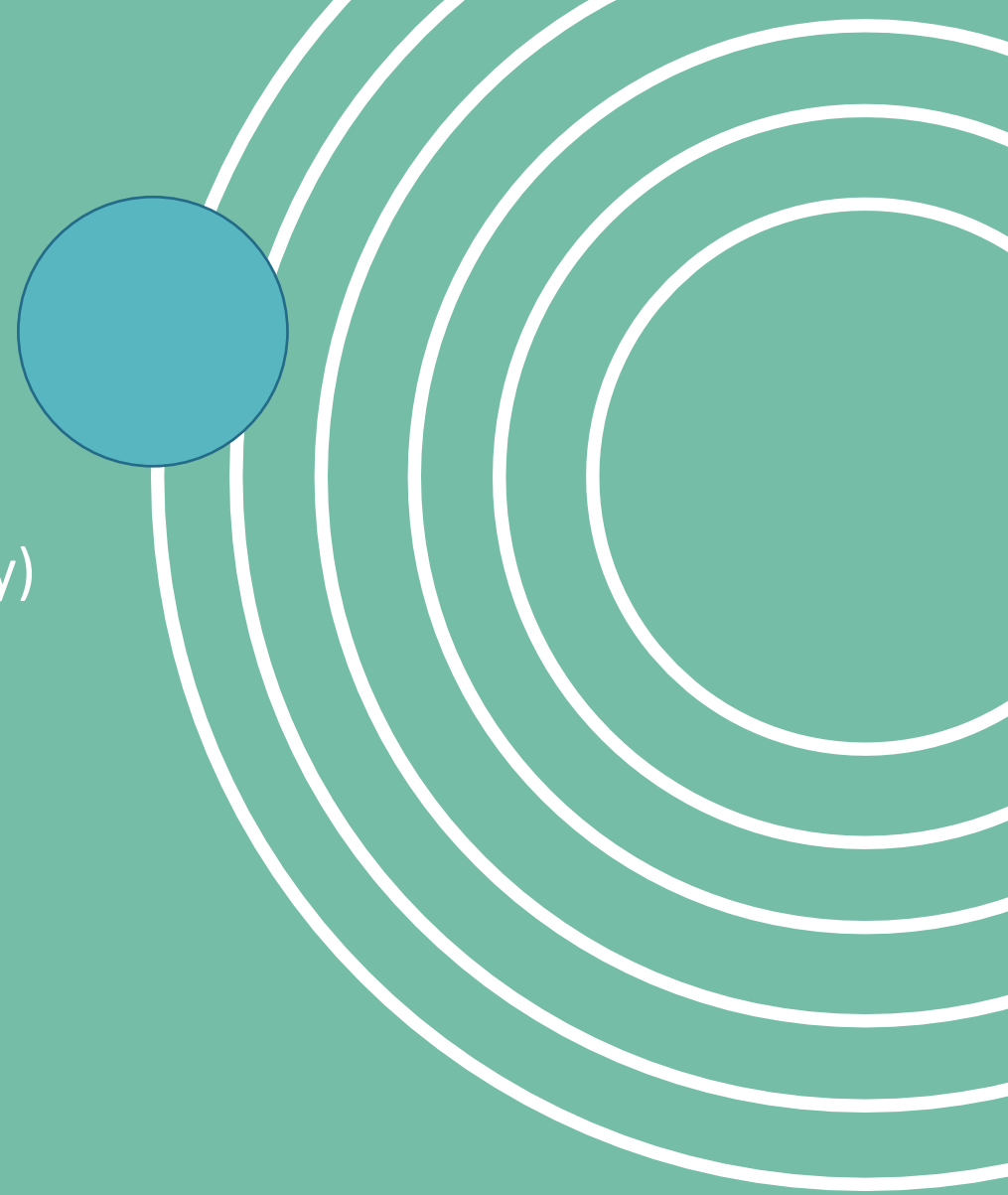
For assistance under title IV of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11360 et seq.), and for related activities and assistance, \$4,051,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2026: Provided, That of the sums appropriated under this heading— (1) \$290,000,000 shall be available for the emergency solutions grants program authorized under subtitle B of such title IV (42 U.S.C. 11371 et seq....(2) \$3,544,000,000 shall be available for the continuum of care program authorized under subtitle C of such title IV (42 U.S.C. 11381 et seq.)...

9. Earmarks

This is where lawmakers can literally write into legislation provisions which direct significant sums, sometimes several millions of dollars, to benefit specific governmental or non-profit entities for particular purposes.

Two different categories of spending

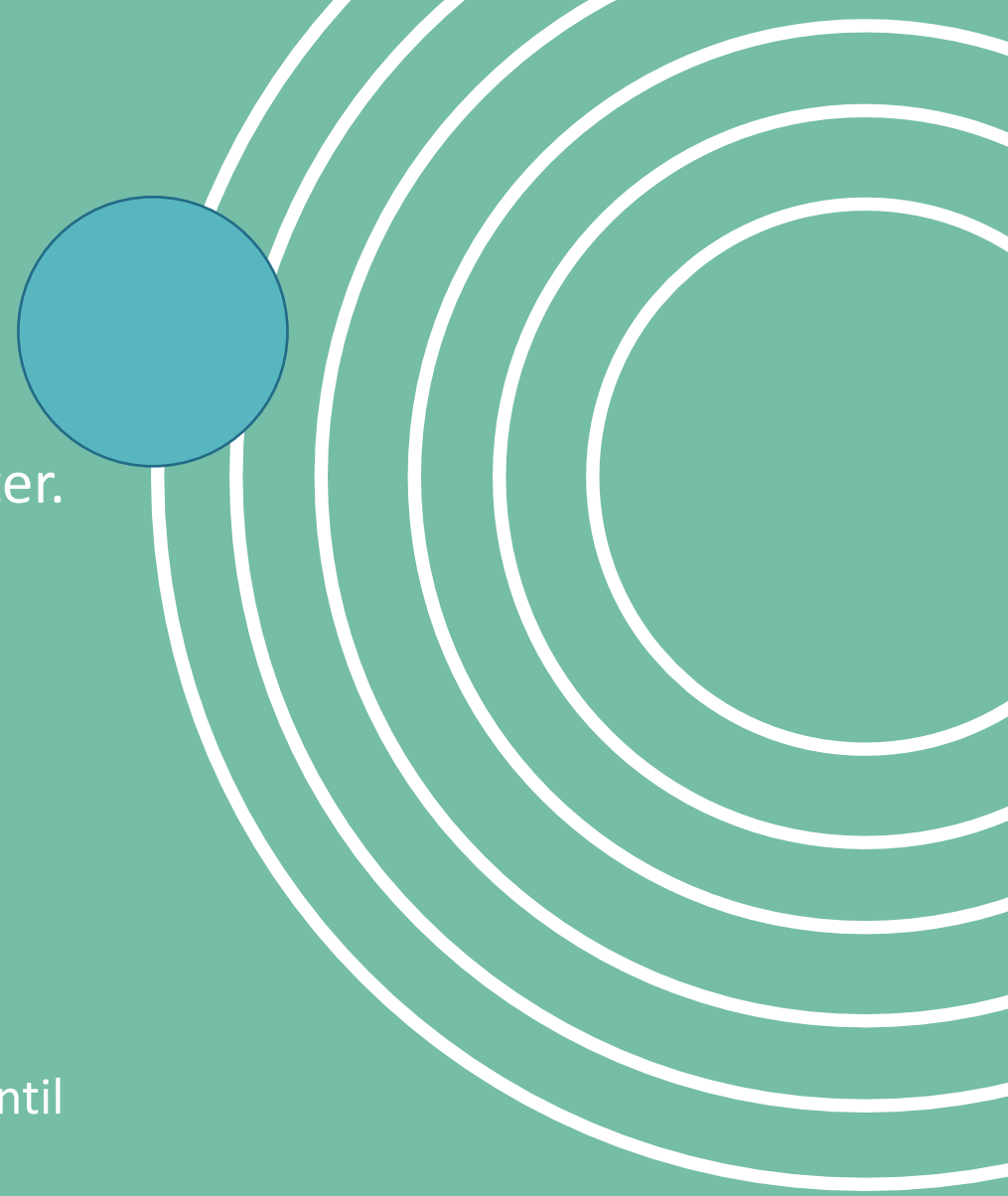
1. Discretionary (formally approved by Congress and the President during the annual appropriations process; funding for HUD programs is discretionary)
2. Mandatory (on automatic pilot; change in law required to reduce or increase this spending; spending on “entitlement” programs is considered mandatory, e.g., Social Security)



How the appropriations process works

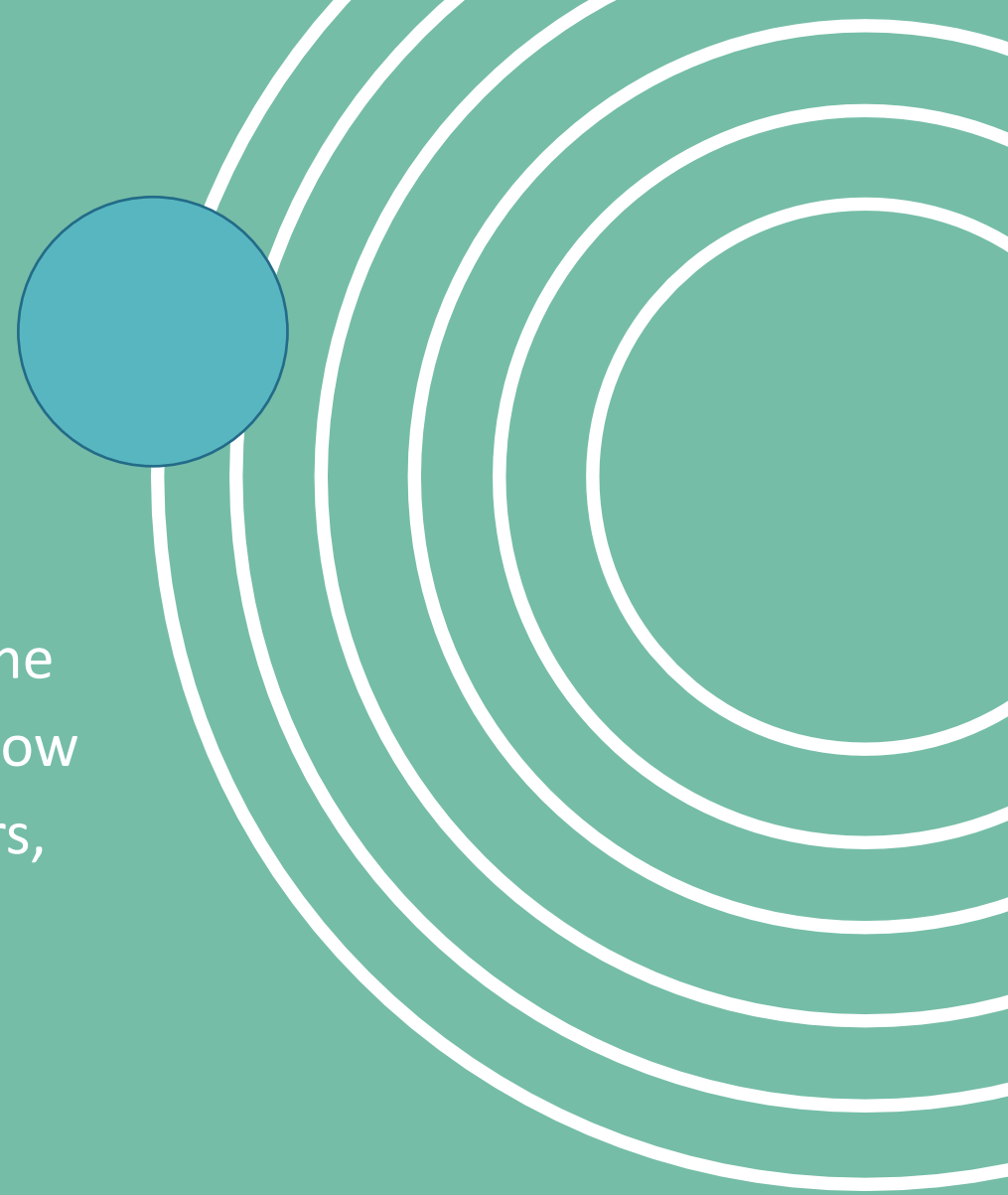
1. The President submits a budget request, usually in February, but submissions are coming later and later.
2. Allocations (based on budget resolution, deeming resolution, or nothing at all)
 - a. 302a: how much money can be spent by the twelve appropriations bills combined
 - b. 302b: how much can be spent by each of the twelve appropriations bills

Note: Sometimes, 302(b) allocations are not agreed on until later in the process, like this year.



How the appropriations process works

3. The twelve House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees, including Transportation-HUD, Military Construction-Veteran Affairs, and Labor-HHS-Education, receive recommendations from the Administration, House and Senate leadership, fellow appropriators, other Representatives and Senators, stakeholders, and constituents through
 - a. Meetings
 - b. Hearings
 - c. Correspondence (e.g., sign on letters); and
 - d. Submissions (ranging from the President's budget request to portal requests)



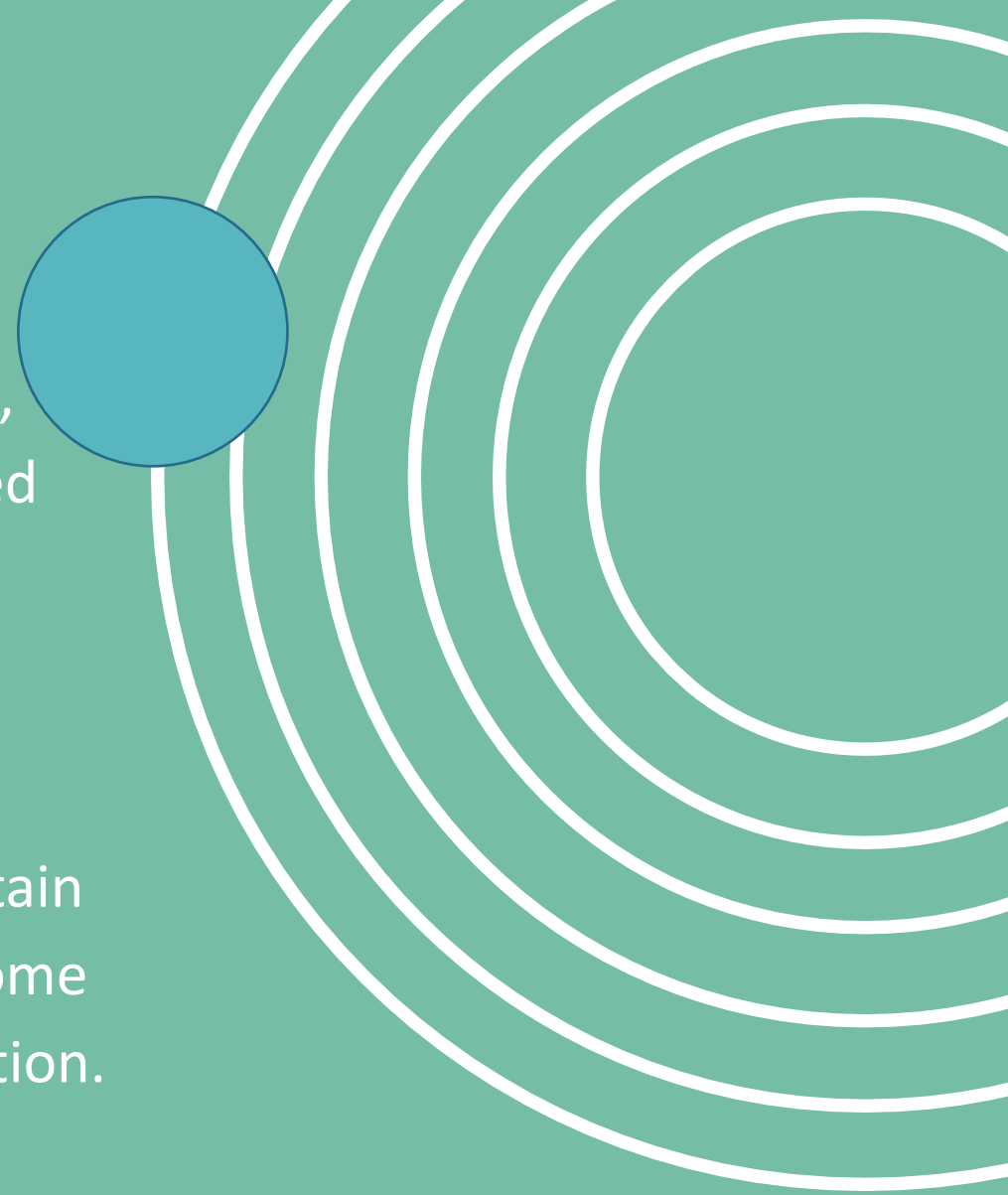
How the appropriations process works

4. Subcommittee mark ups
5. Full committee mark ups (amendments)
6. Floor consideration: sometimes in the House, rarely in the Senate (amendments)
7. House-Senate conferences: resolve differences between the House and Senate bills, including the active participation of the Administration and leadership.



How the appropriations process works

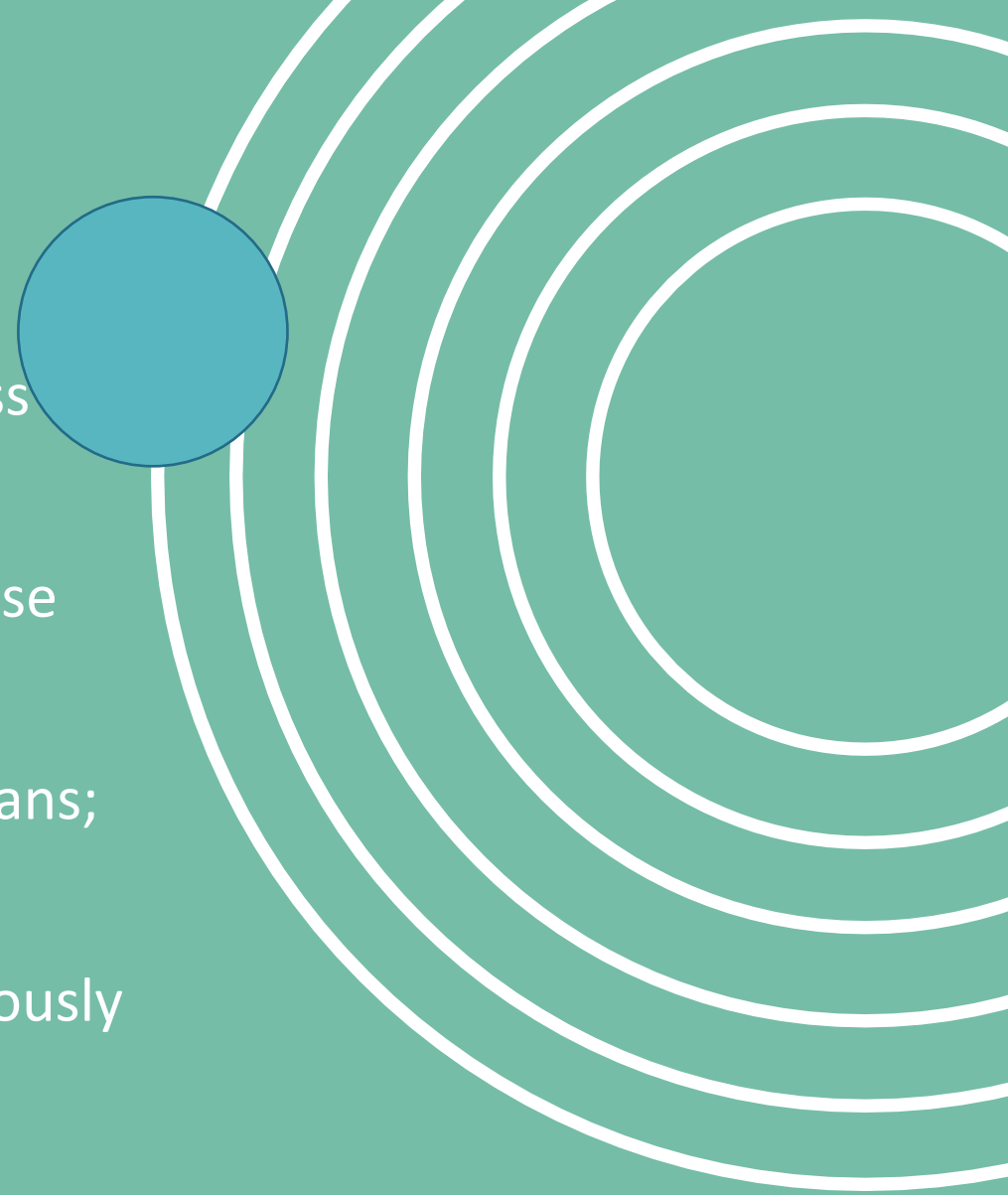
8. A conference report, with all differences resolved, must be passed by both chambers and then signed into law by the President. (No amendments)
9. Omnibus / Minibus: combining one or more appropriations bills into a larger one
10. Continuing resolution: continue funding for a certain period of time at last year's levels, usually with some "anomalies", mostly suggested by the Administration.
11. Appropriations Shutdowns: caused by lapses in funding when there is no appropriations bill or continuing resolution in effect.



How the reconciliation process works

When is the budget resolution / reconciliation process used?

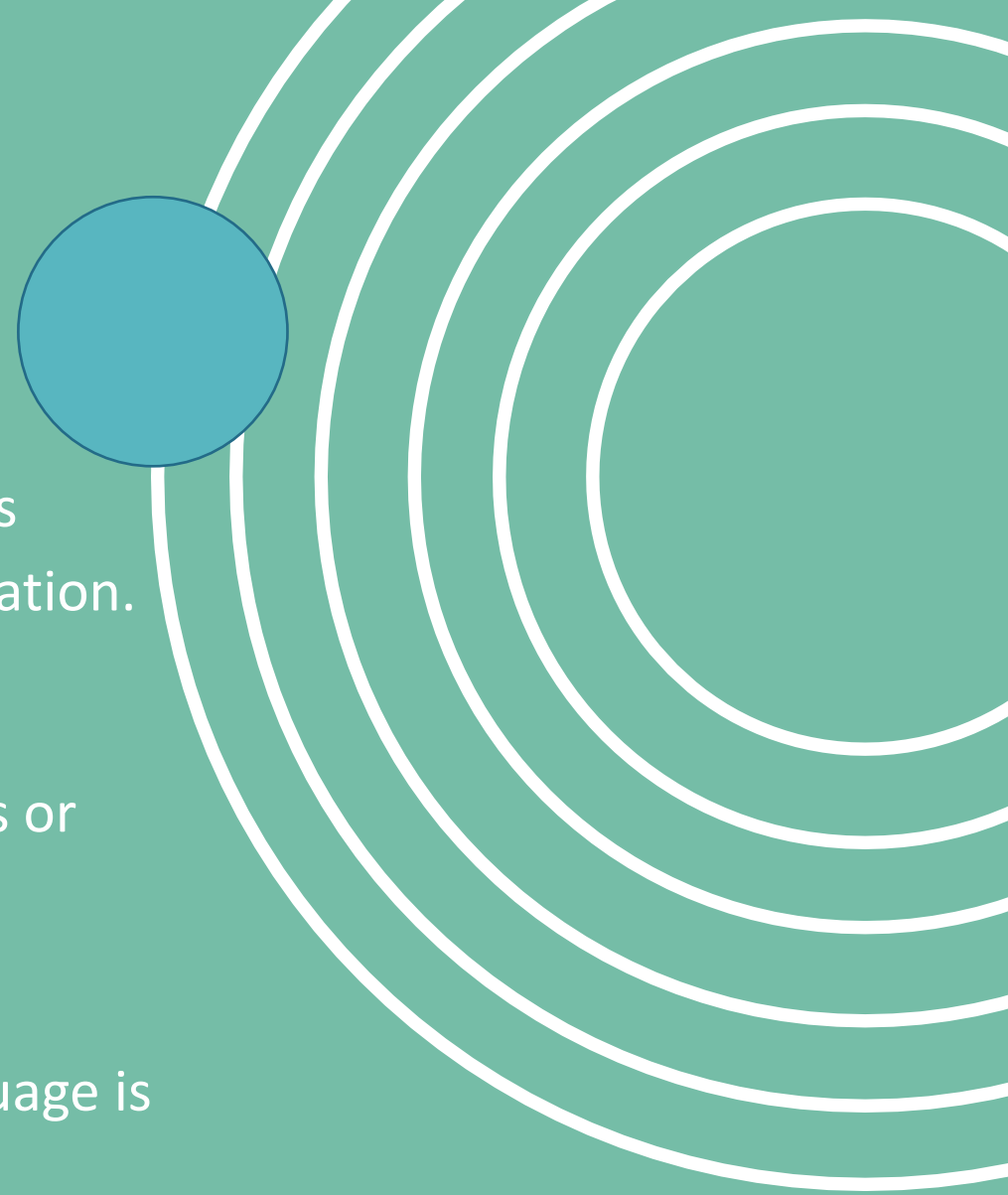
1. Lately, when one party has control over both House and Senate and the White House as well;
2. That party has ambitious tax and / or spending plans; and
3. Wants to move the necessary legislation expeditiously without having to deal with the Senate minority.



How the reconciliation process works

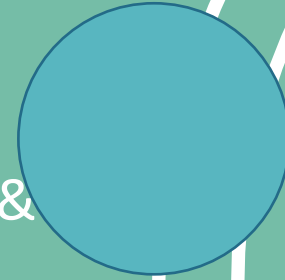
What is a budget resolution?

1. A budget resolution is a very basic, even bare-bones outline to guide Congress in tax and spending legislation.
2. It sets overall targets on spending and revenues.
3. It doesn't determine spending for specific programs or change tax law by itself.
4. It's just a resolution, not a law (not signed by the President); and it only takes effect if the same language is agreed to by both House and Senate.
5. No cloture vote required on a budget resolution, debate on the Senate is time-limited.



How the reconciliation process works

1. A budget resolution is needed to do reconciliation, & reconciliation helps the majority to get legislation through the Senate if it commands fewer than 60 votes.
2. The committee report to the budget resolution might include “reconciliation instructions” to committees to draft legislation that would have certain budgetary results (i.e., impact on deficits).
3. The legislation drafted pursuant to these directions gets expedited consideration (limited debate, simple majority) in the Senate.
4. Both chambers must pass identical legislation, which must then be signed into law by the President.

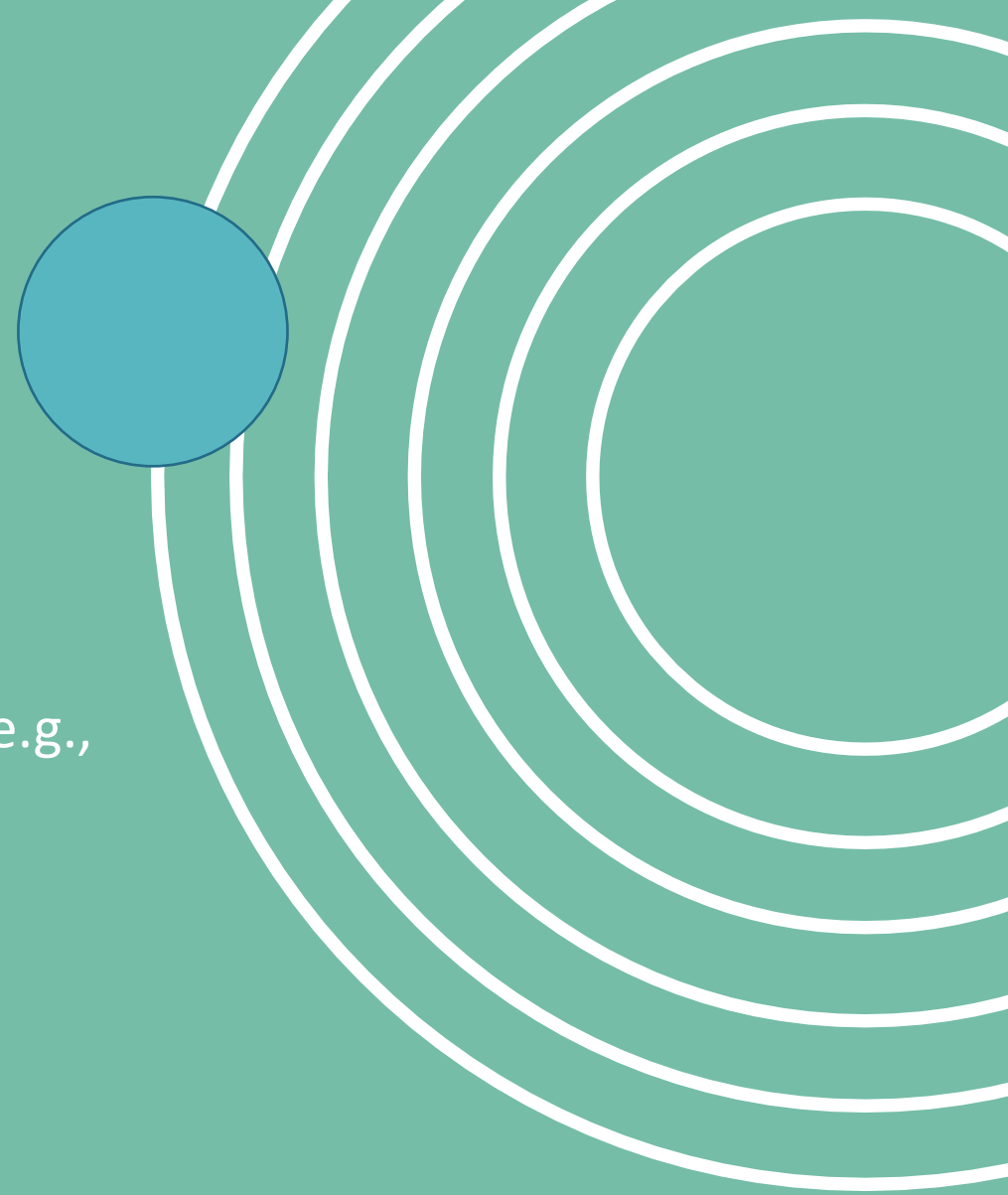


How the reconciliation process works

How reconciliation is being used in this Congress:

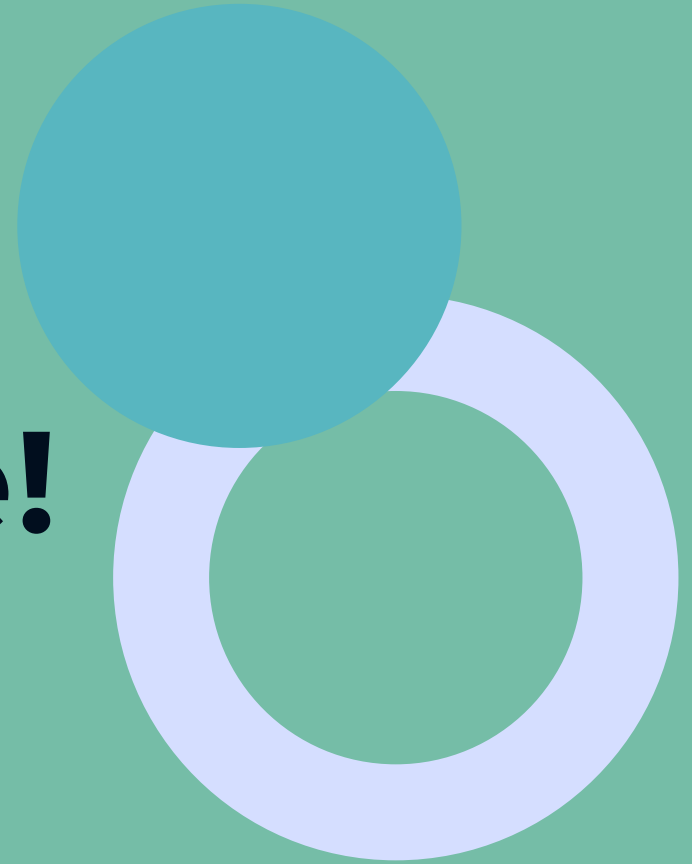
1. tax cuts,
2. mandatory spending cuts (Medicaid, SNAP), and
3. some policy changes that affect spending or taxes, e.g., Medicaid work requirements.

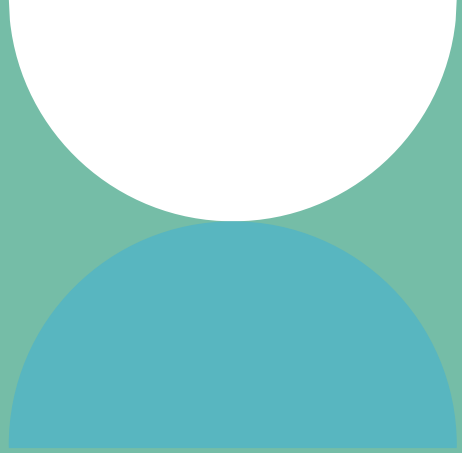
BREAK!



Advocacy 101: Beginners, Start Here!

**Part 2: Practical advice
on how to advocate/
lobby your lawmakers**





Why I worked in homeless services but didn't lobby!

SAMANTHA



**What's the difference
between lobbying and
advocacy?**

SAMANTHA



Why state and local government employees can lobby

SAMANTHA

How Congressional offices actually work

Things to remember:

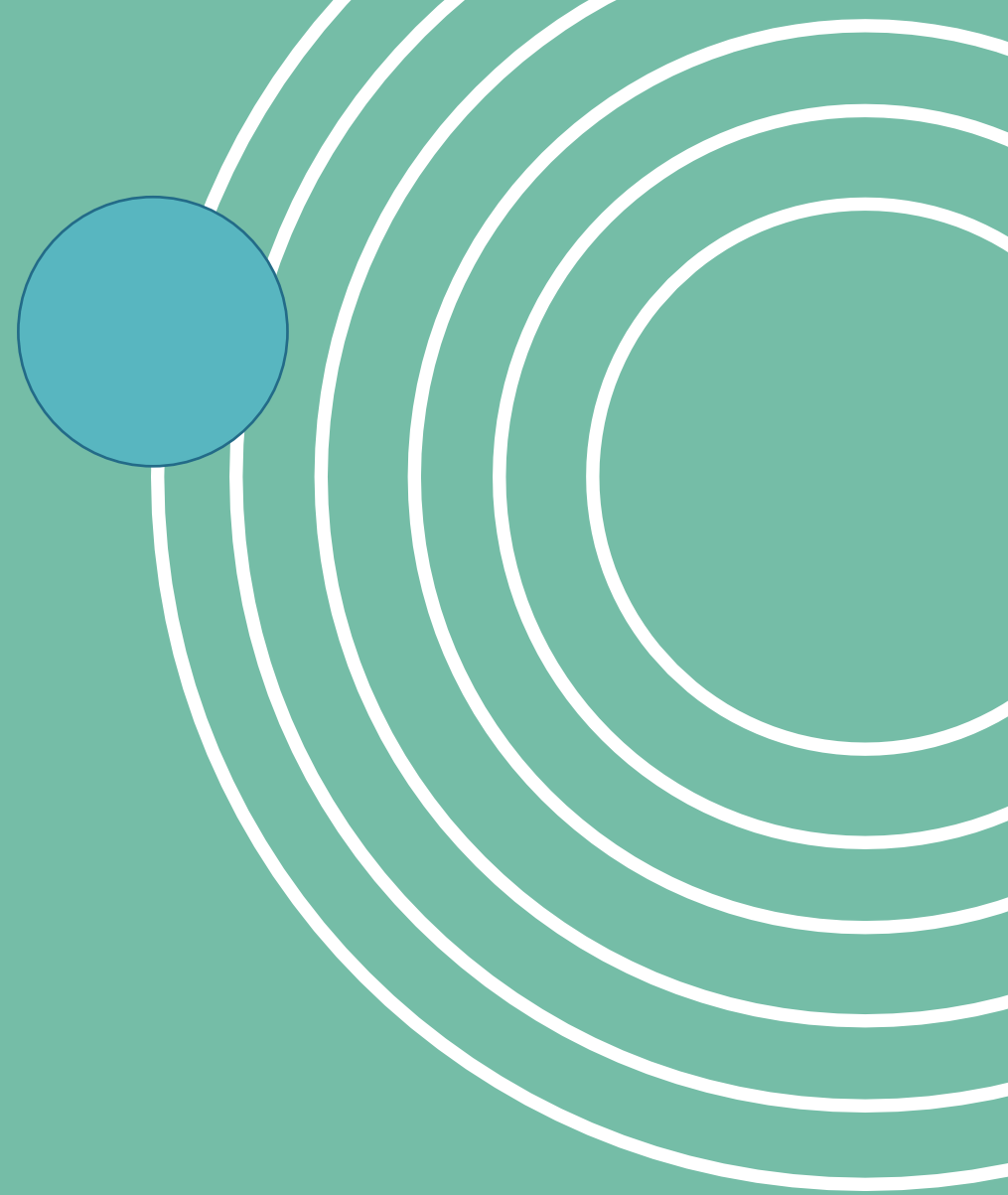
- Members offices are built to match the District and the member's priorities.
- The makeup of House offices and Senate offices differ.
- No matter which side of the Capitol your congressional member resides, the staff are there to serve the member's interests and the interests of their constituents.



What roles do staff serve in a Congressional Office?

DC Staff:

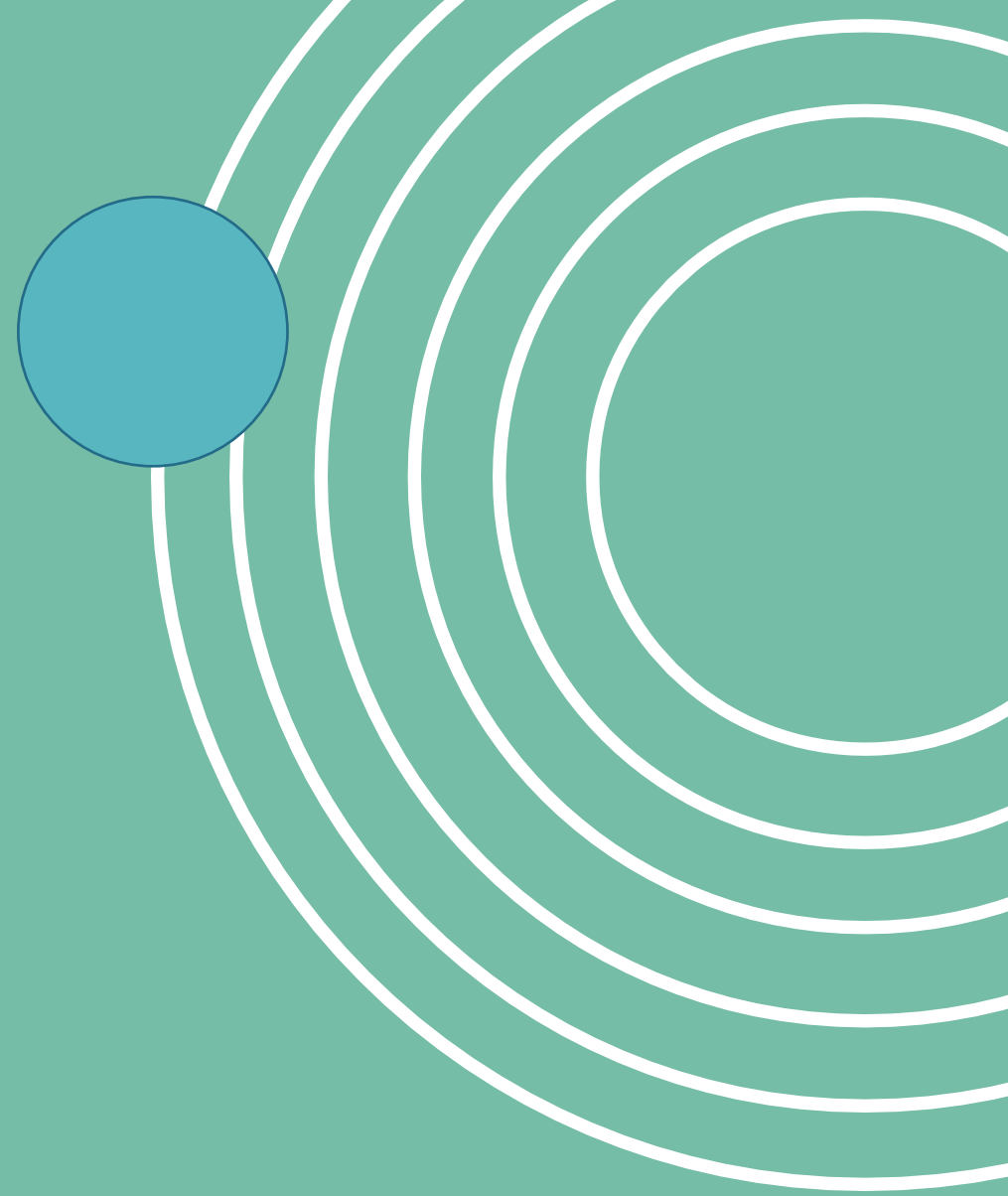
- Chief of Staff
- Operations/Office Manager
- Legislative Director
- Legislative Assistants/Aides
- Legislative Correspondents
- Press Team
- Staff Assistants
- Interns



What roles do staff serve in a Congressional Office?

District/State Staff:

- State/District Director
- Scheduler
- Press Staff
- Office Manager
- Constituent Services Liaisons
- Staff Assistants
- Regional Representatives

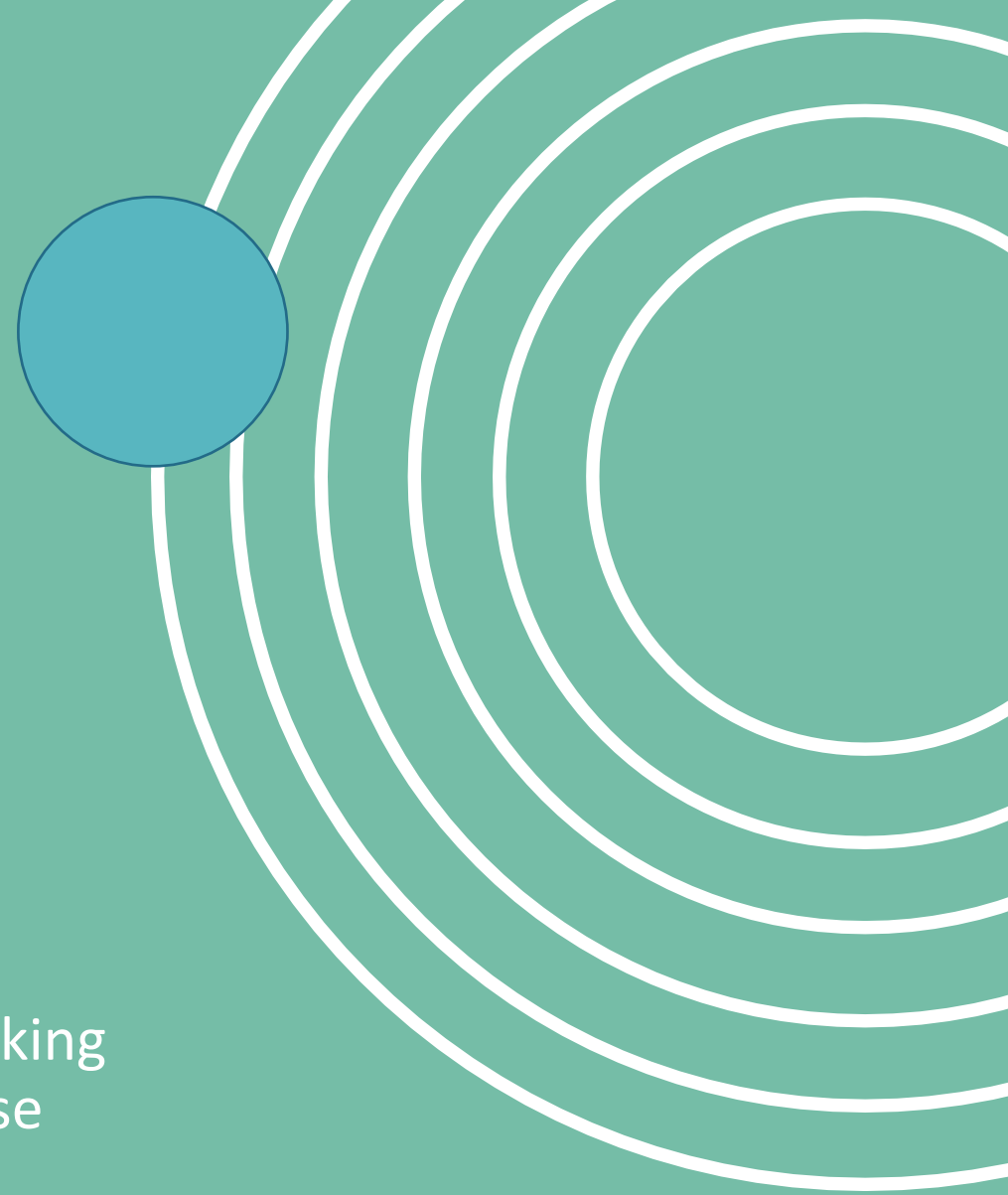


What roles do staff serve in a Congressional Office?

Committee Staff:

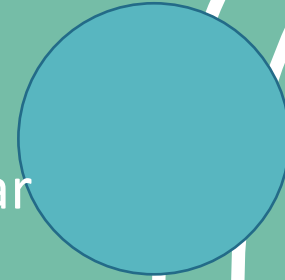
- Staff Directors
- Clerks
- Professional Staff
- Legislative Correspondents

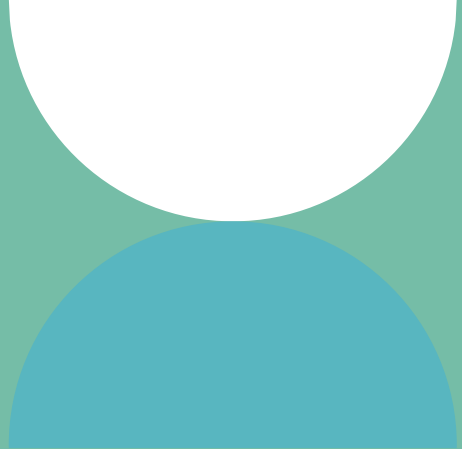
While committee staff serves all the members of the committee, their first priority is always the Chair/Ranking Member and they are usually considered staff of those two.



How do you know you have a strong relationship with a member's office?

- The staff proactively reaches out to you for regular check-in meetings.
- Staff contacts you about pending legislation and its effect on the district or state.
- You have met with the member either in DC or the district/state.
- The office reaches out to you to participate in district or press events.
- You have occasional meetings with high level staffer or DC staffers when they visit the district/state.

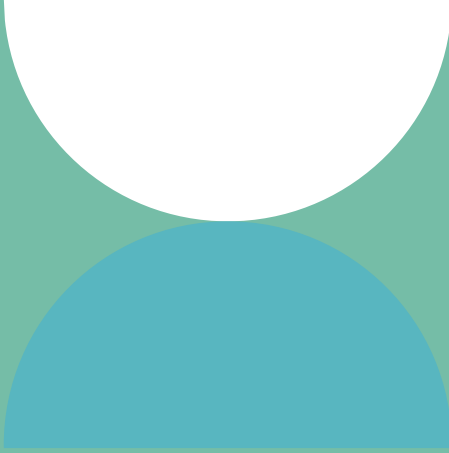




How to schedule meetings

SAMANTHA





How to research your lawmakers

CULLEN



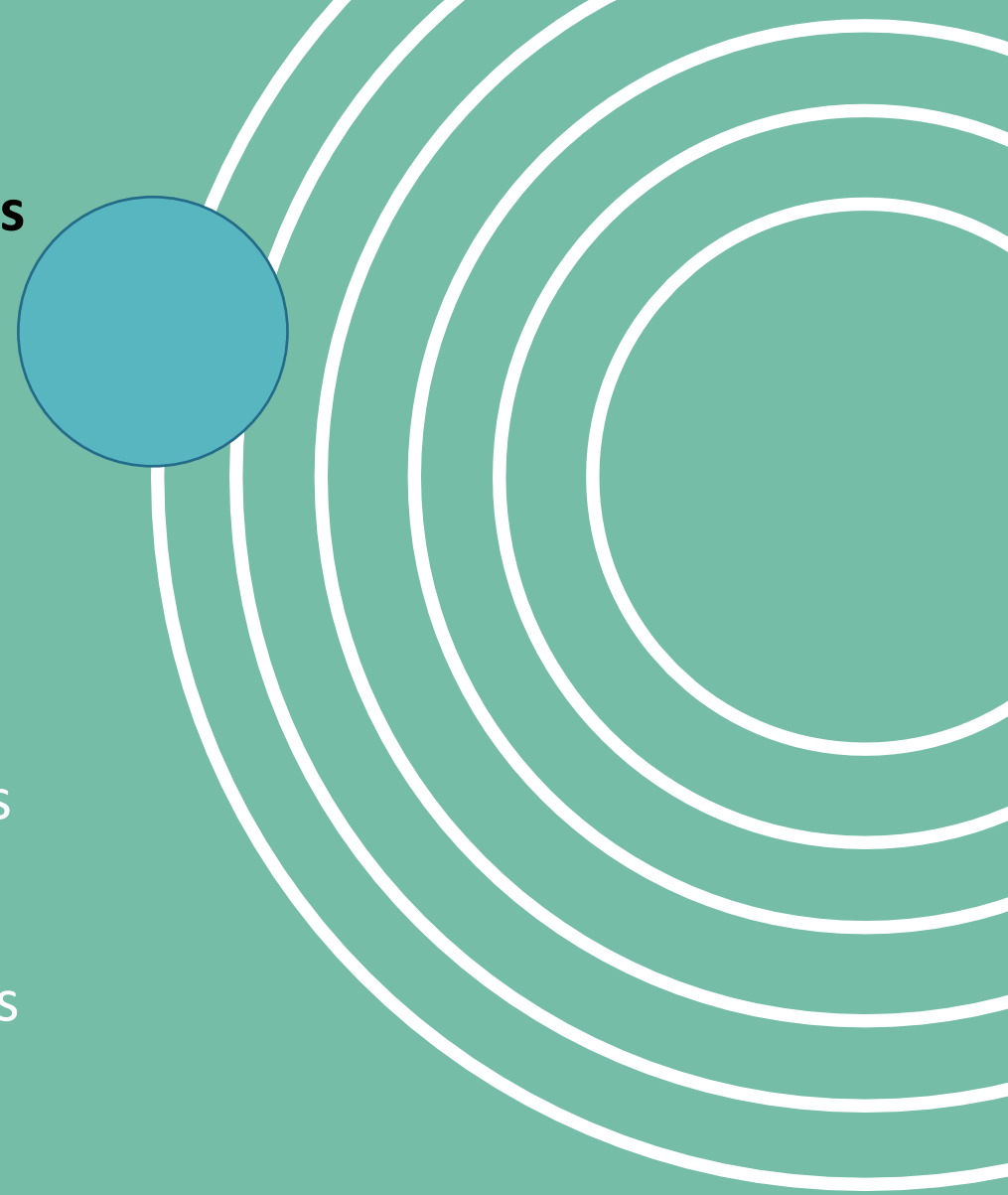


Preparing for meetings with your lawmakers

CULLEN

Advocate for Shared Goals & Collective Interests

- Take off your agency hats – advocate for the general needs of the population you serve vs. the interests of one organization.
- Each organization is just one piece of the puzzle.
- This builds trust among organizations and presents a unified front to your lawmakers.
- Inclusivity makes your advocacy stronger and helps you build a reputation as a neutral and trusted advocate.



Meetings are where we turn policy into reality

Our goal is to leave each member of Congress and their staffers memorable, personalized images of how these resources make a difference, and why they are needed.

Setting a clear, concise agenda will keep everyone focused. This is where collective advocacy and speaking with one unified voice is helpful – everyone will be on the same page.

Work closely with all advocates attending Delegation meetings, but specifically PWLE to create focus for the meetings.

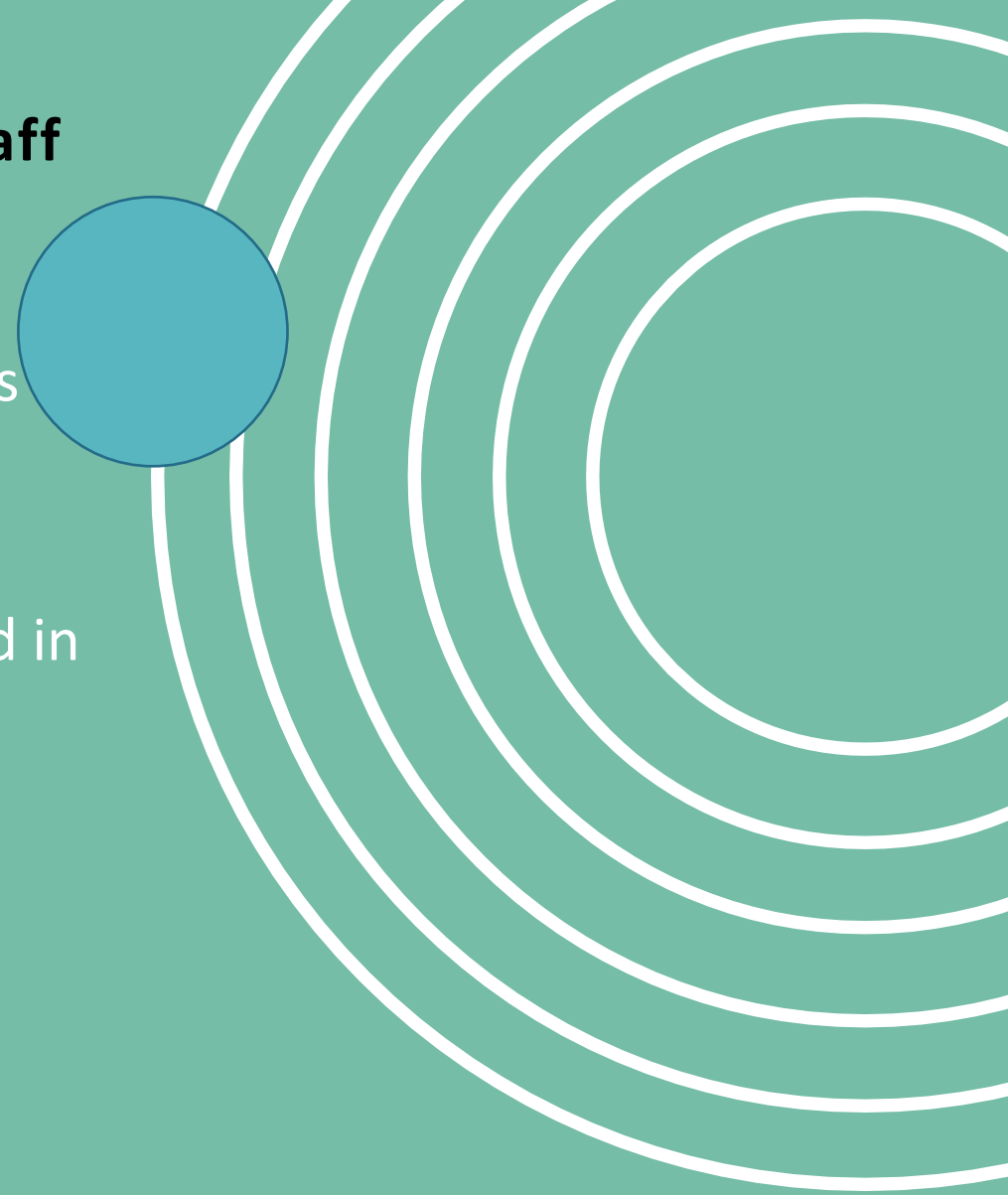


Plan the agenda to maximize Delegation and staff time, and attendee's expertise

Round-robin styles work well for Delegation members and their staff.

Having people with lived experience (PWLE) sprinkled in among other advocates for Delegation meetings is ideal.

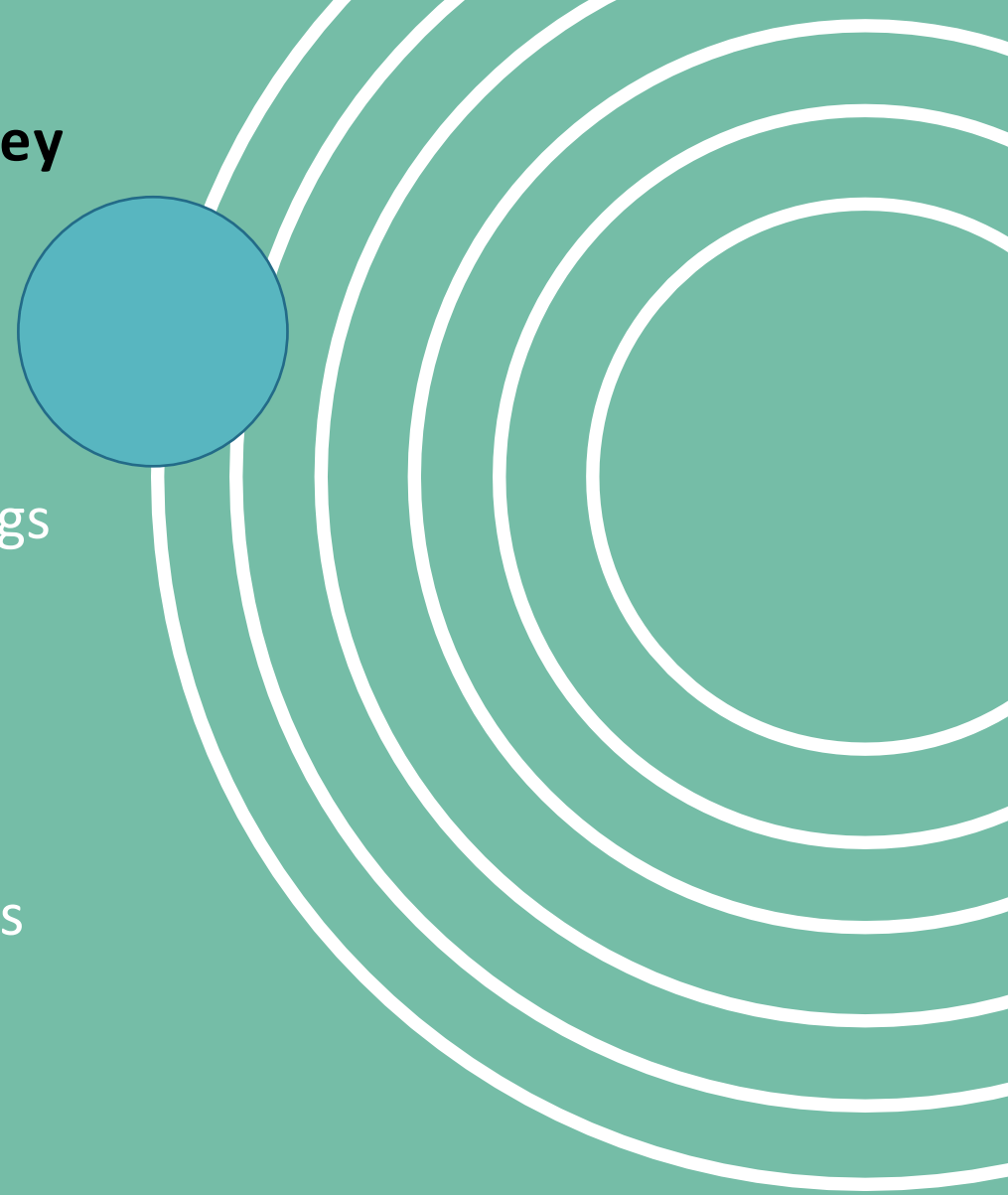
Having advocates prepared to tell their story in 1-minute is key – these meetings are very time-limited.



Preparedness and presenting a united front is key to your credibility

Hold prep meetings with partners/community members before meeting with Lawmakers and their staff and delegating topics to help Delegation meetings go smoothly.

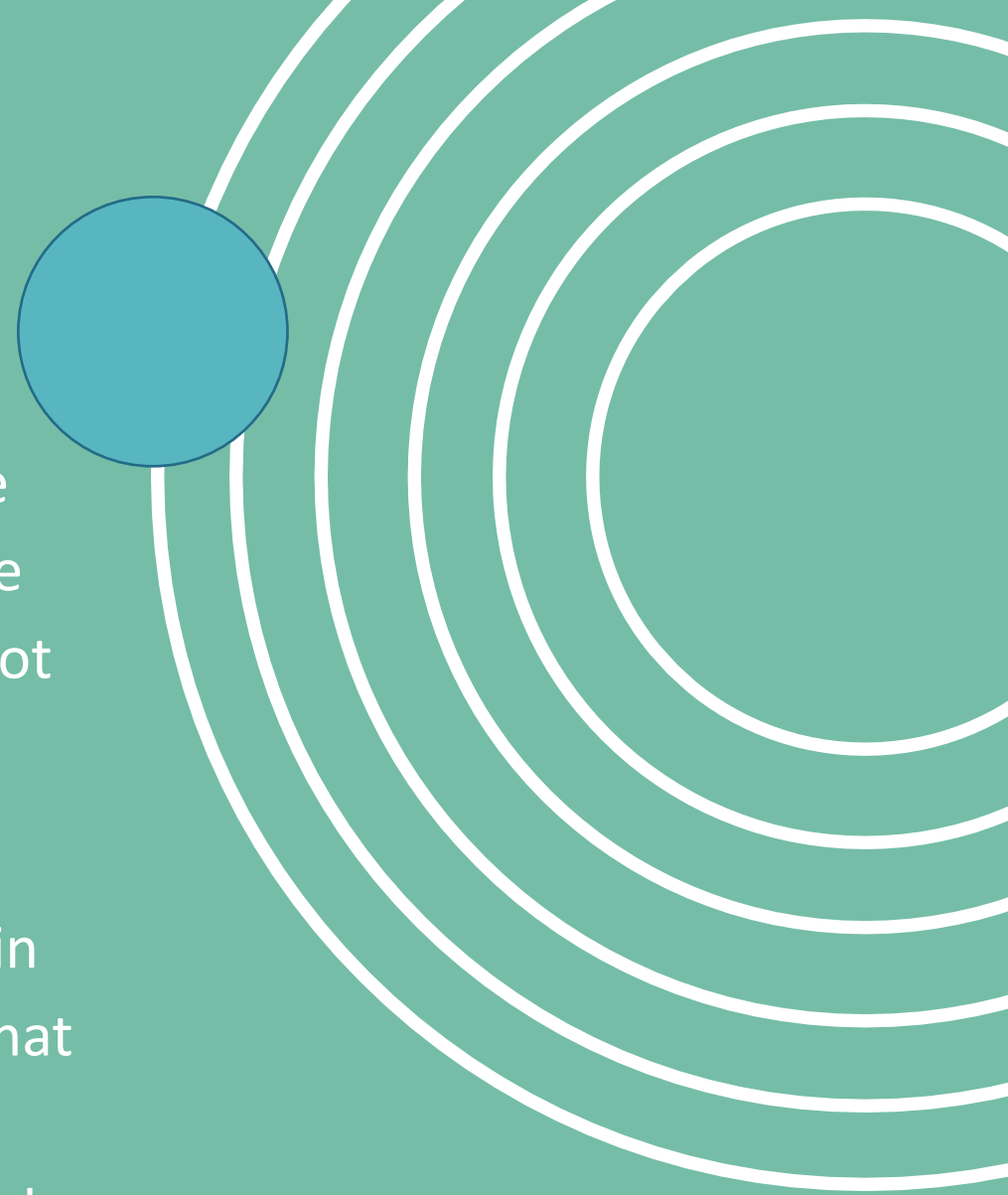
Get everyone on the same page regarding talking points and asks to present a united front to your Lawmakers and their staff. Disagreements in meetings can undermine your work and credibility.



Expect the unexpected and prepare for it!

The location of meetings with your Lawmaker can change and happen anywhere – their office, a private room in the Capitol, a hallway outside of a Committee Room, and anywhere in between! Be prepared to pivot last minute.

Your Lawmaker may show up late! The meeting may start with staff and your Member of Congress may join halfway through. If this happens it's best to pause what you had been discussing and restart with your Lawmaker. You can always circle back to what you had been discussing with staff when your Lawmaker exits the meeting.

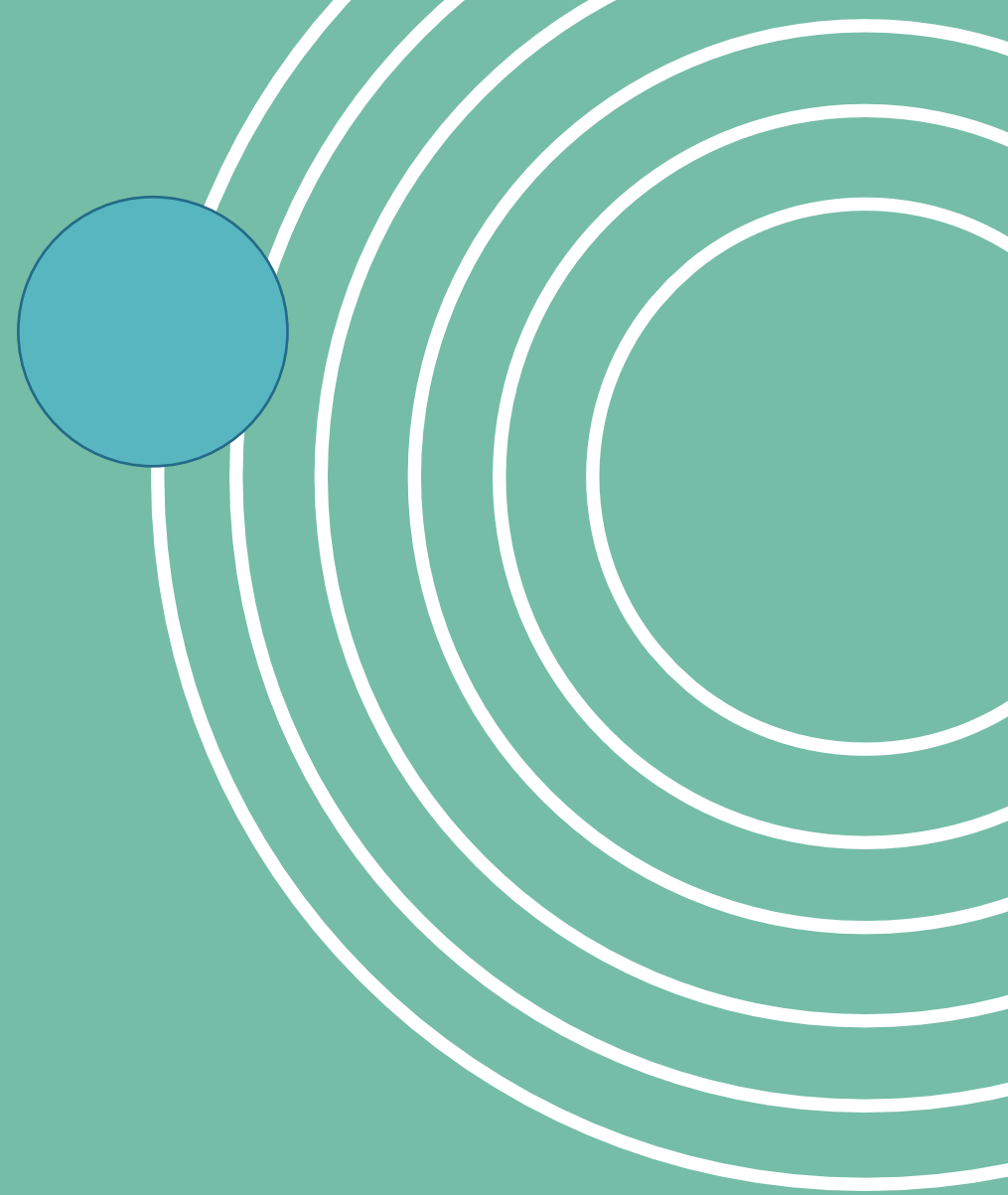


Expect the unexpected and prepare for it!

You could have the perfect meeting agenda, but you may need to adjust it on the fly. Your Member of Congress could take over and steer the meeting.

If your Lawmaker throws in curveballs, go with the flow!

If your Lawmaker asks questions, answer them!

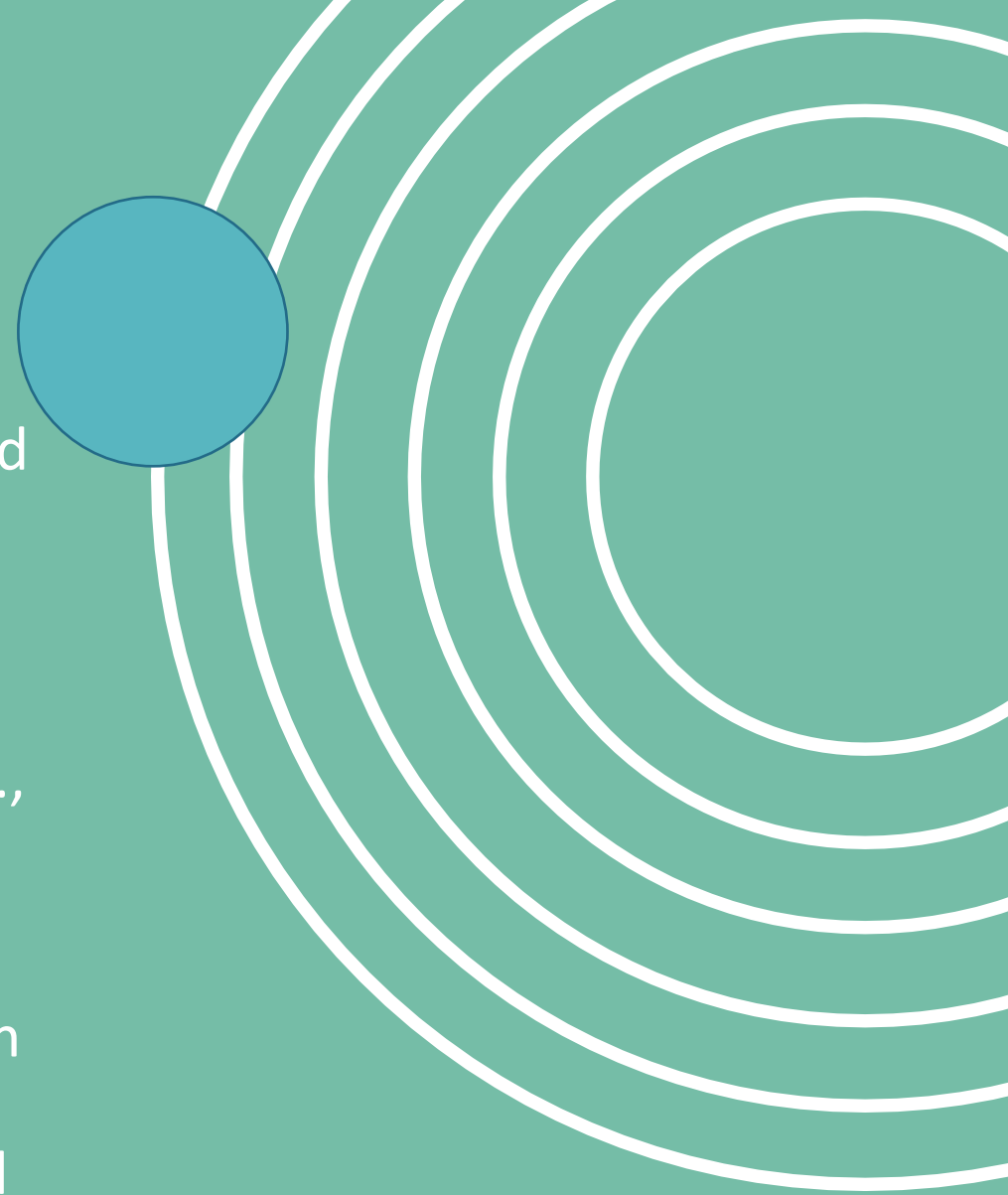


Continue the dialogue for effectiveness & relationship building

Reach out to Delegation Members and their staff shortly after meeting to thank them for their time and leadership.

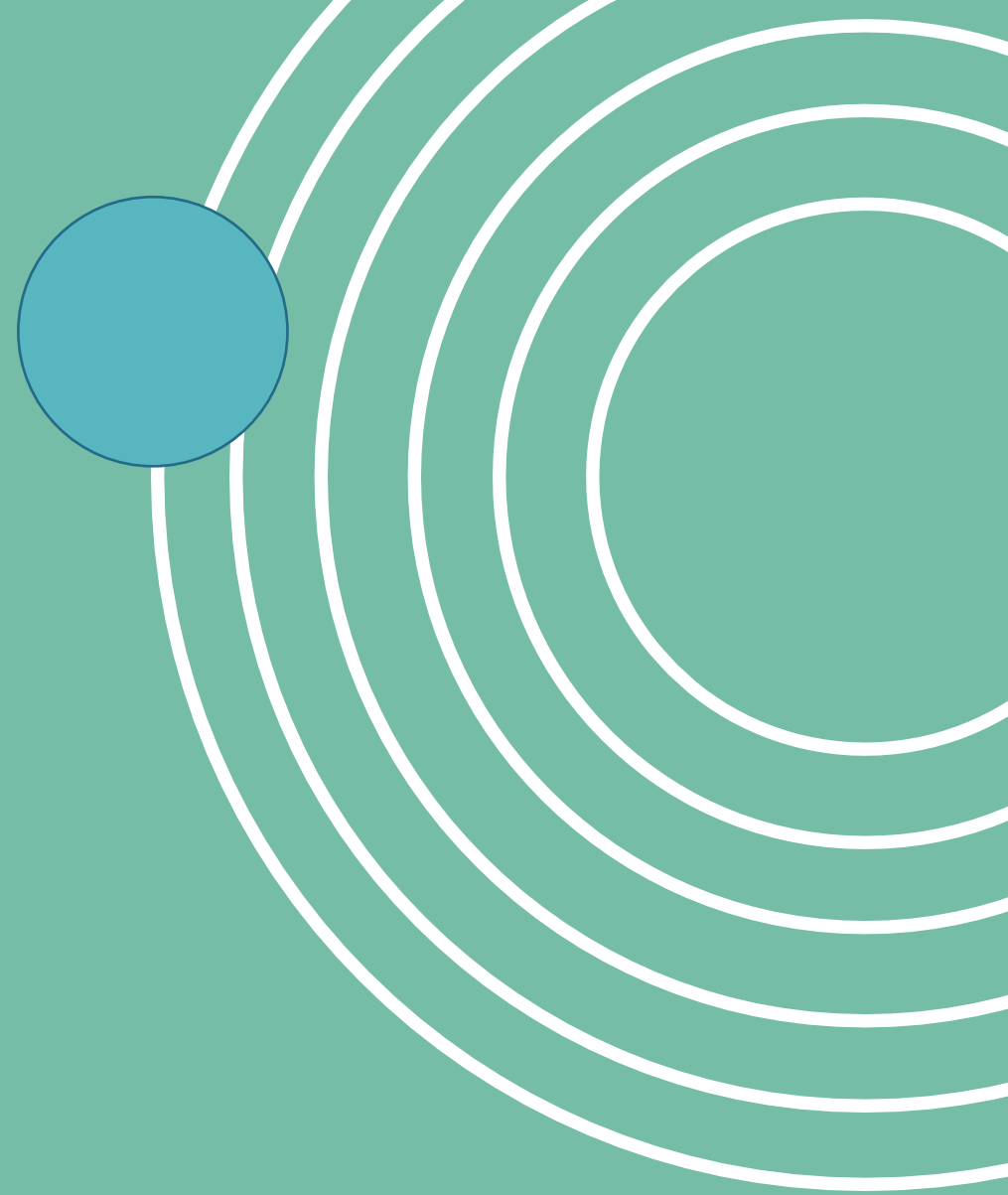
Provide any additional information referenced or requested (data, factsheets, one-pagers, contact info., etc.) to continue to be a resource.

Schedule follow-up meetings and/or invite Delegation Members and their staff to visit programs for a first-hand account of the difference Federal resources and policy initiatives have on your community.



How to size up Congressional staff

- Don't give the same presentation every time. Tailor your presentation to the staffer.
- Is the staffer a veteran or a novice?
- Does the staffer know your service area?
- Does the staffer know your programs?
- Look for clues and small talk topics
- Use your small talk productively
- Are you being understood? Is the staffer getting glassy-eyed? Check with questions. Do you need to provide more detail and context?



Working with Congressional staff

- What's your leave-behind? Hand it over before or after your meeting?
- In your follow up email thank you for the meeting, you should include or attach your leave-behind.
- Are you and the Congressional staffer in a judgement-free zone?
- Allow time to listen and respond to questions.
- Always be truthful. If you don't know something, don't wing it. Say you'll get back to them—that's expected!
- You're unlikely to get answers back at the end of the meeting. That's okay.



Making Policy Requests

1. Lay the groundwork / set the scene

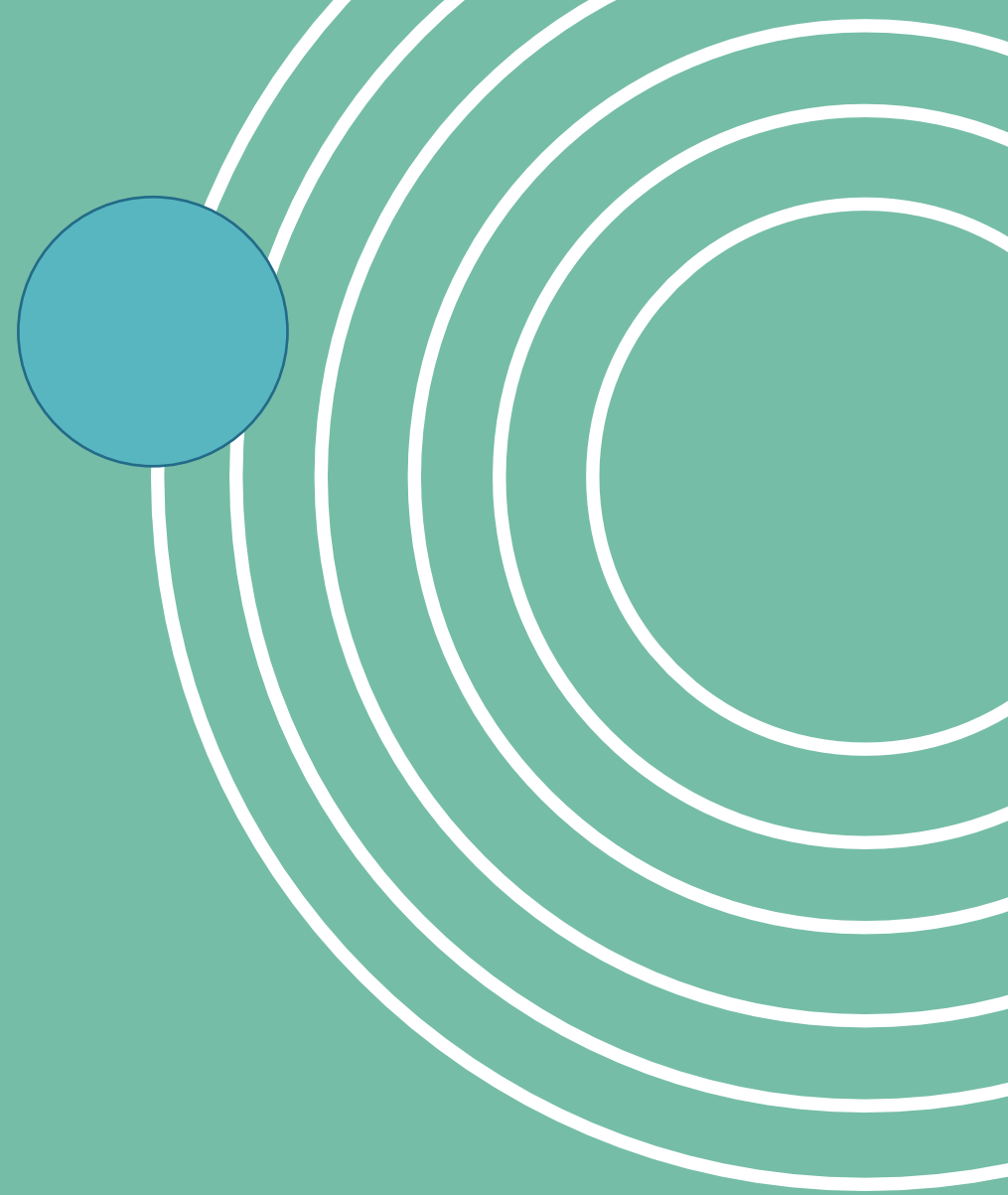
- Build towards the request

2. Show your importance to the community

- Why should the lawmaker pay attention to you

3. Talk about accomplishments as well as challenges

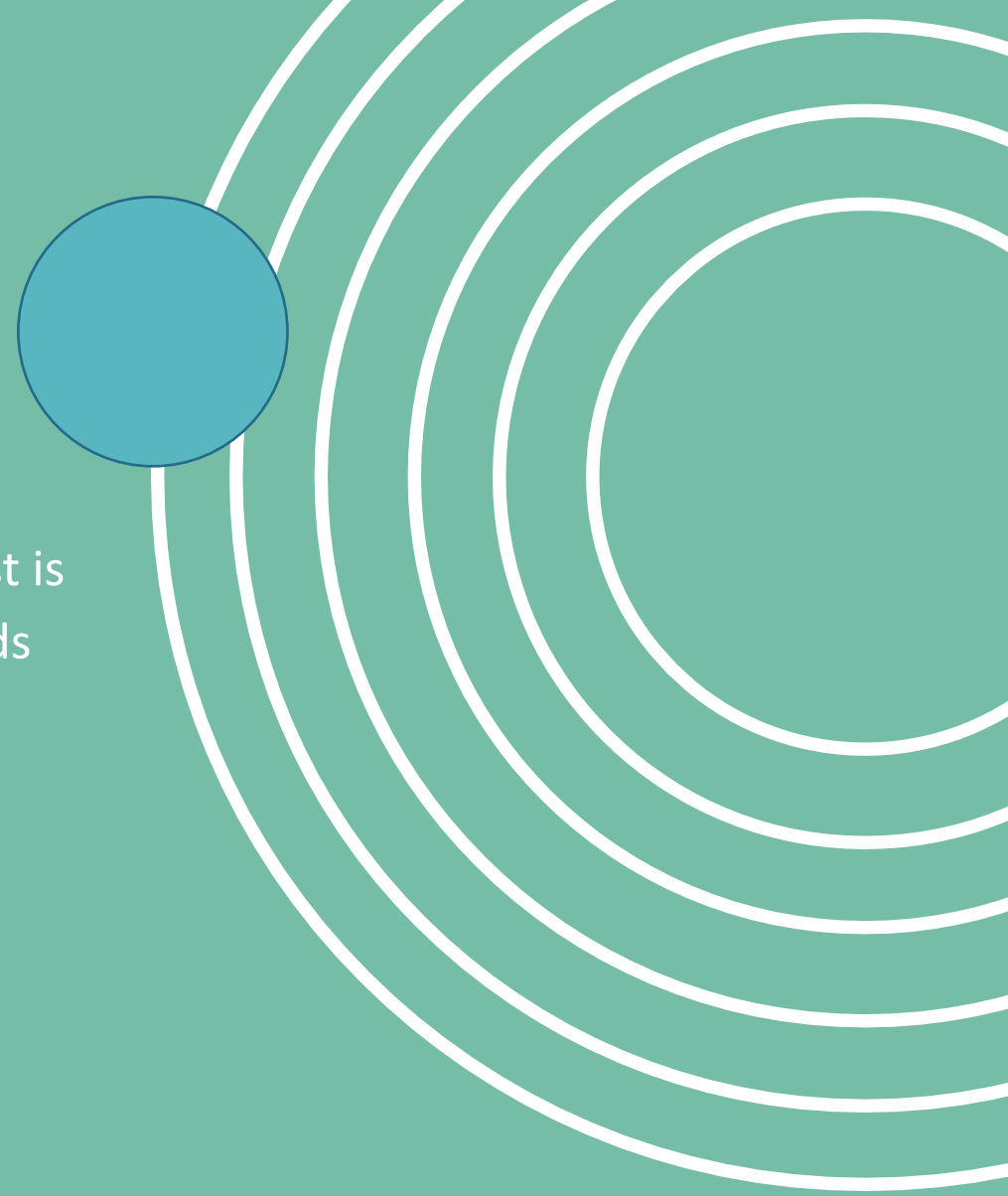
- Remind the lawmaker of the things you do well
- Don't make your challenges seem unsolvable



Making Policy Requests

4. Localize your request—how it would benefit constituents back home

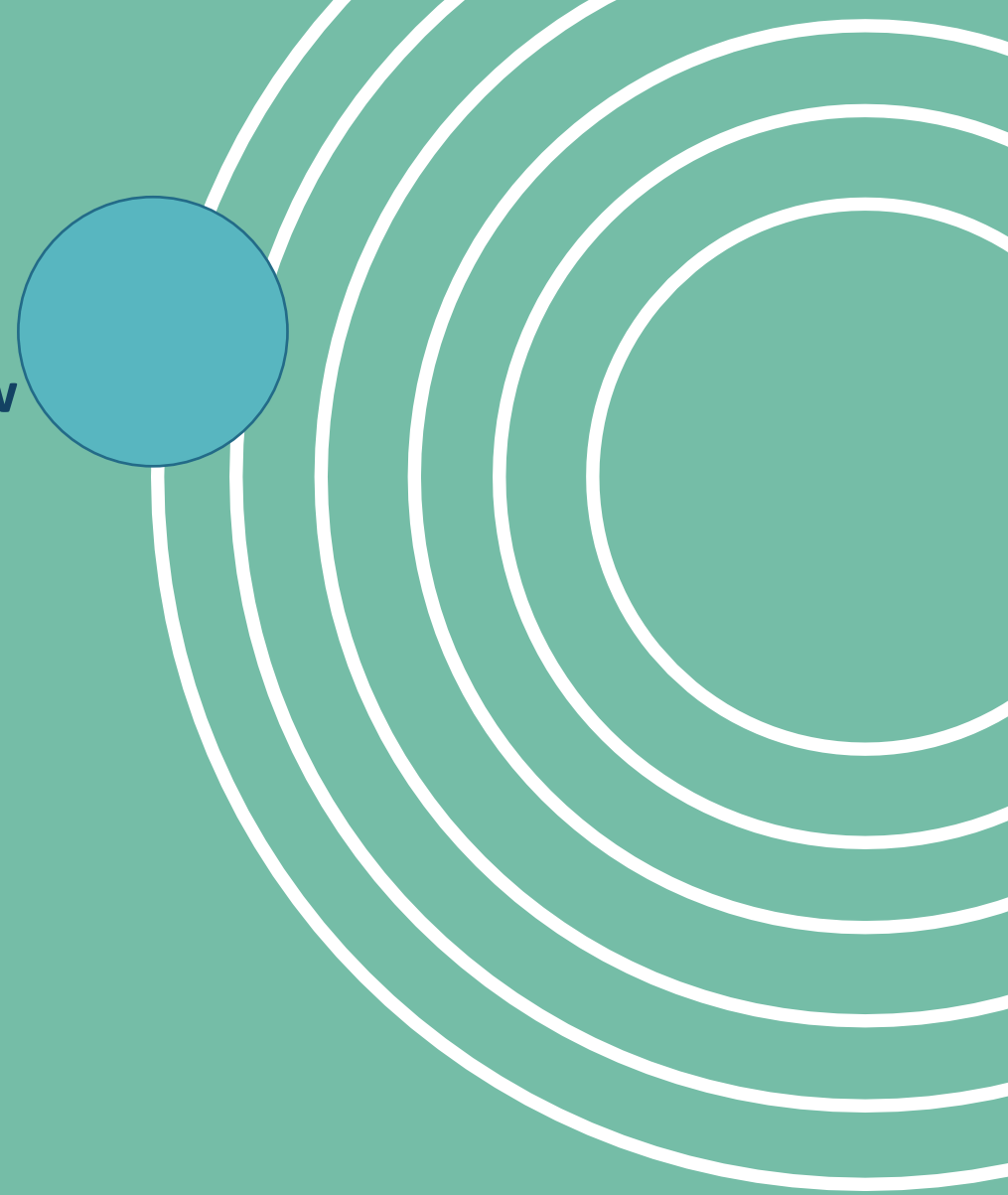
- For example, asking for the Alliance's funding request is great, but quickly pivot to why your community needs additional funds



Making Policy Requests

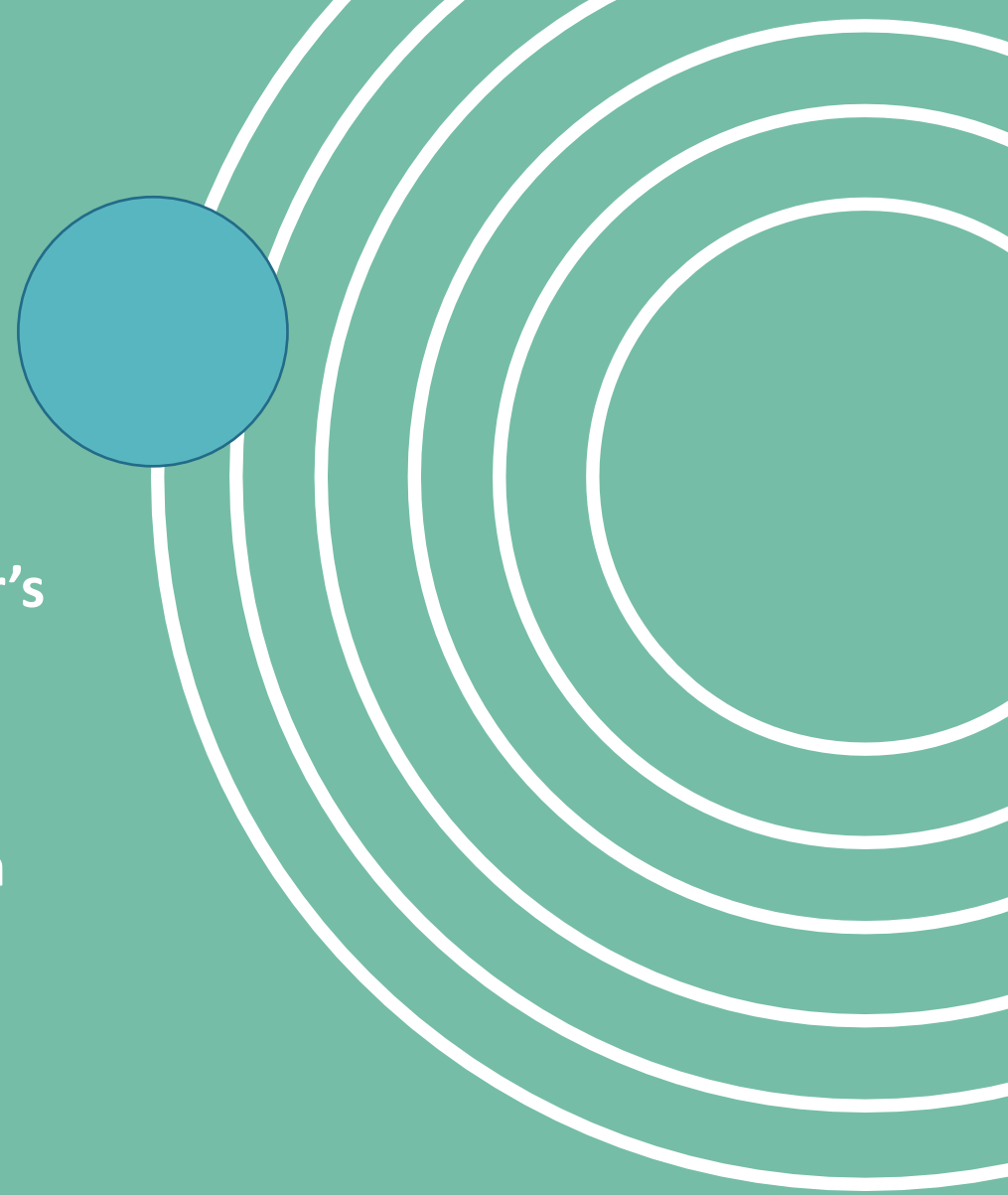
5. Understand what motivates your lawmakers—how can you appeal to them?

- What does your lawmaker LOVE? Saving money, spending money, helping people they know, helping humanity, improving the community, getting government off our backs, promoting faith-based solutions, publicity, wants to be seen helping old people...
- What does your lawmaker HATE? Spending money, government programs that don't work, community becoming less livable, treating people unfairly, unsheltered homelessness...



Making Policy Requests

6. Are there favorable precedents you can invoke in support of your request?
7. Are you asking for something within the lawmaker's power?
8. Think about how to streamline your request for lawmakers with little time and / or short attention spans (elevator pitch, or “walk with me” pitch).
9. How to react when lawmakers interrupt your meetings with their staffers



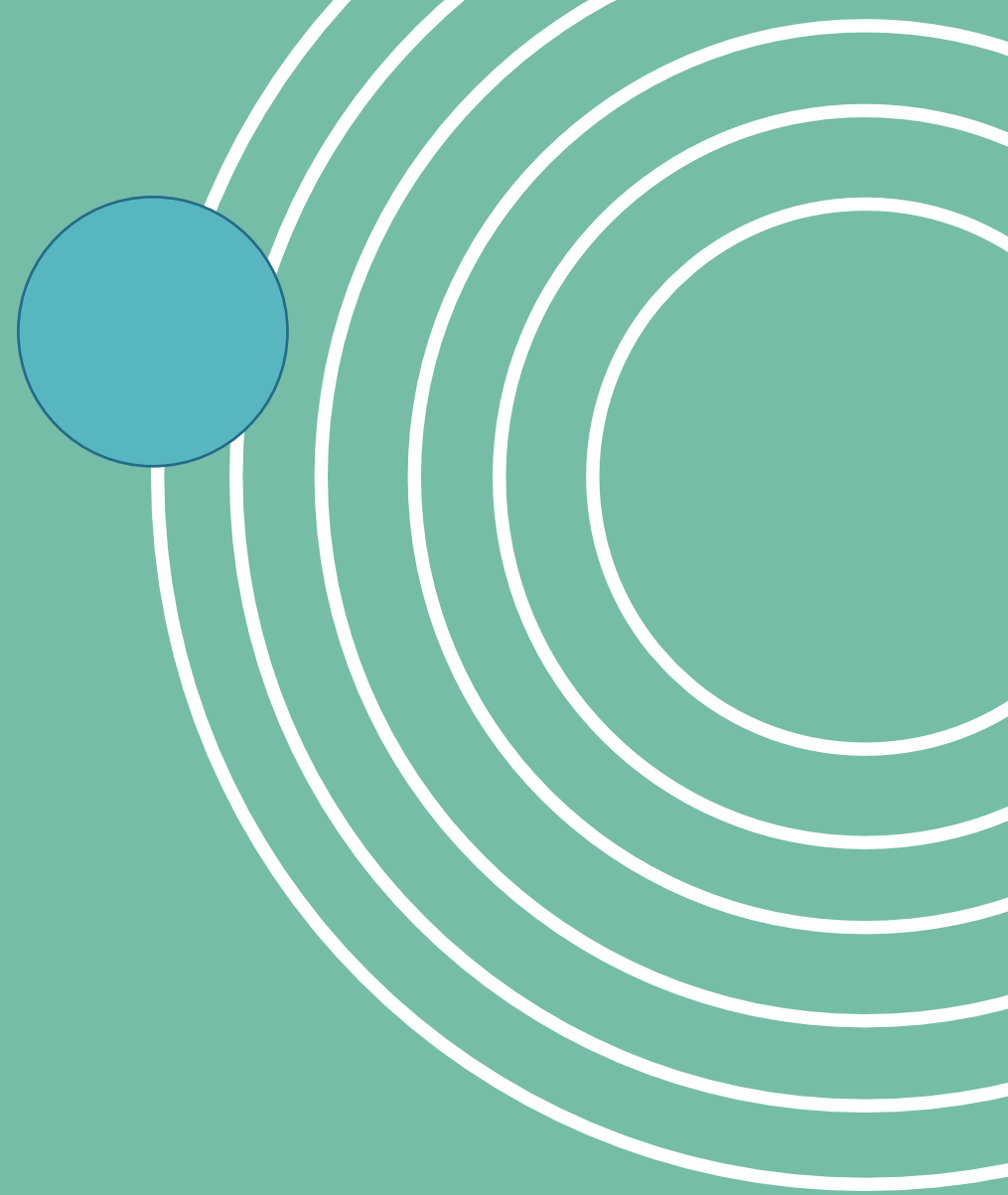
Problem, Solution, Request (PSR)

First Draft for Emergency Housing Vouchers:

P: The problem is that funding for emergency housing vouchers (EHVs) will run out in late 2026.

S: The solution is to provide additional funding to continue using the EHVs.

R: The request is that you ask for more funding.



P: Starting in 2021, we used Emergency Housing Vouchers to successfully end the homelessness of some of our hardest cases—the people we had long struggled to get off the streets—as well as victims of domestic violence. The problem is that funding for emergency housing vouchers (EHVs) will run out in late 2026. Some folks have relinquished their vouchers, but 59,000 vouchers are still in use across the nation, including 4,000 in our state. If these EHVs run out of funding, most of these people would become homeless, reversing the incredible progress we have achieved over the last several years.

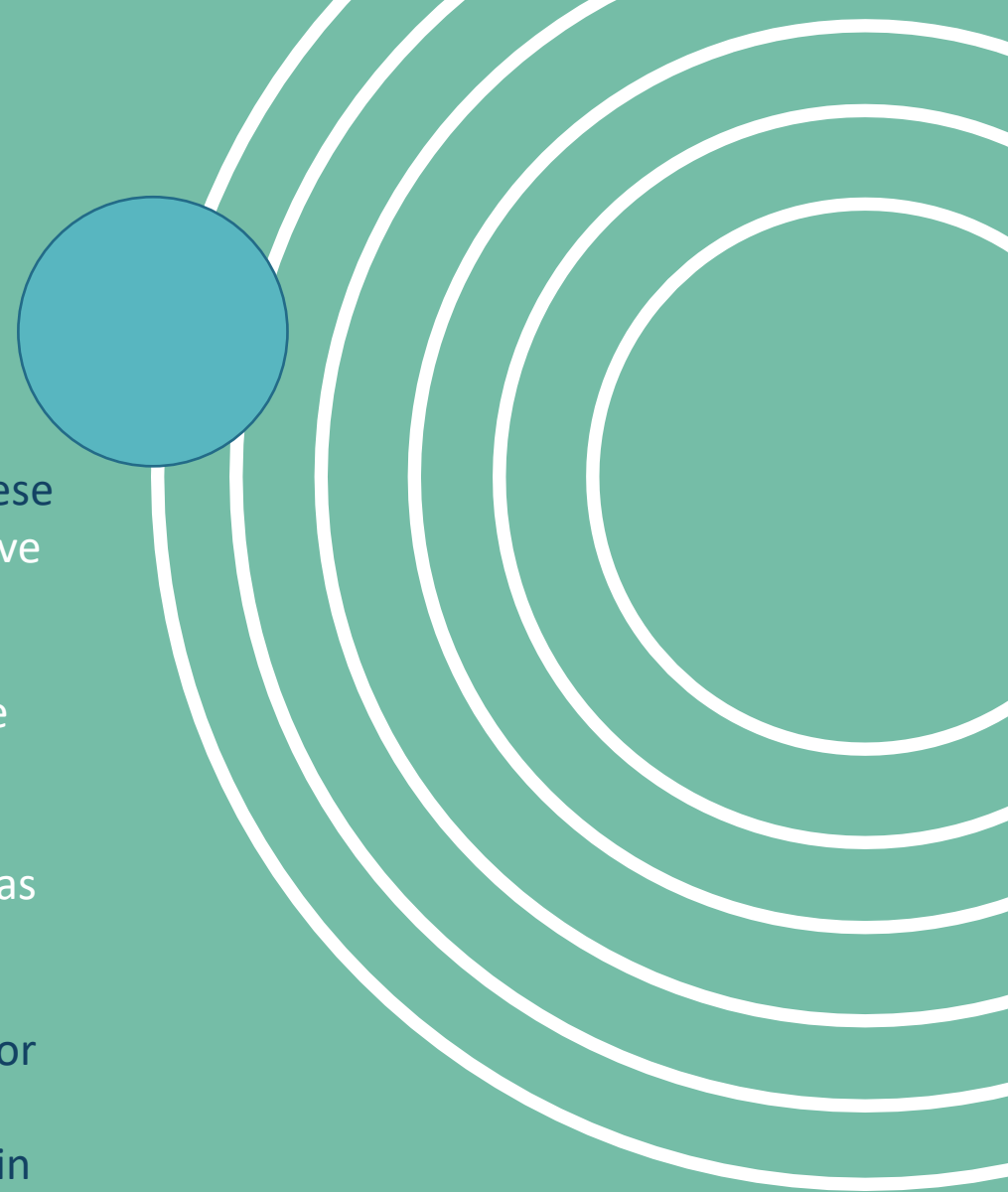
S: The solution is to provide additional funding to continue using the EHVs. Sure, we'd like to transition EHV households to other housing assistance, but we have no excess capacity. And even if we did use a regular voucher on an EHV household, that would mean someone who has been waiting for years would lose their chance to get housed.

R: We need you to secure more funding for the EHV program. Senator Padilla is circulating a sign on letter to the House and Senate THUD Appropriations Subcommittees in support of sufficient funding to maintain EHVs through FY26. Would you please help our state keep these 4,000 EHV households safely and securely housed by signing on to the Padilla letter?

P: Starting in 2021, we used Emergency Housing Vouchers to successfully end the homelessness of some of our hardest cases—the people we had long struggled to get off the streets—as well as victims of domestic violence. The problem is that funding for emergency housing vouchers (EHVs) will run out in late 2026. Some folks have relinquished their vouchers, but 59,000 vouchers are still in use across the nation, including 4,000 in our state. If these EHVs run out of funding, most of these people would become homeless, reversing the incredible progress we have achieved over the last several years.

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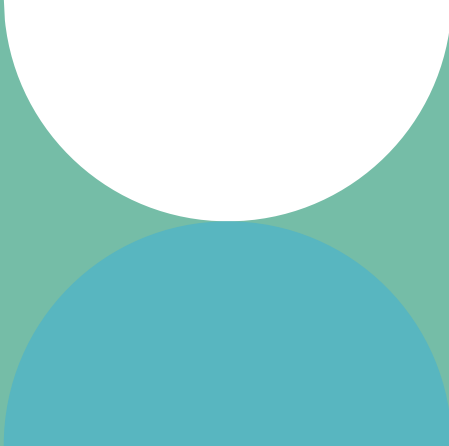




Stories!

Lawmakers love stories. And that's great news for the homelessness sector because our work generates stories:

- how someone became homeless because of an illegal eviction,
- how a family got back on its feet and into permanent housing because of few months of rapid re-housing assistance,
- how an encampment sweep offering no alternative placements made it harder to help homeless people in your community,
- how a low barrier shelter made it easier for unsheltered people to come inside,
- how you connected victims of domestic violence and their children with emergency housing vouchers, and
- how you managed to get a man who had been outside for years and suffering into permanent supportive housing...



Getting answers

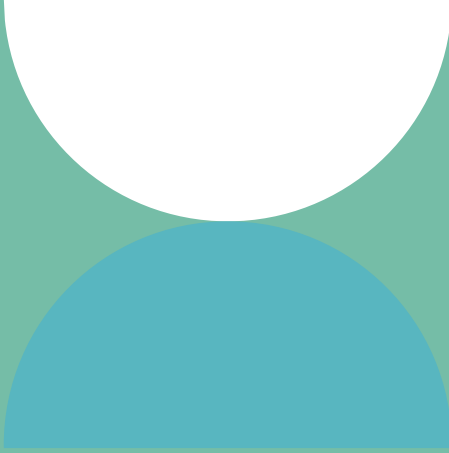
Don't expect answers to your requests at the end of your meetings. Congressional offices must usually perform their due diligence:

1. Is your account accurate?
 2. Are your arguments plausible?
 3. What is the office's record on these issues? Precedents?
 4. Who is on the other side?
 5. What are the implications for the district / state?
 6. What does the Admin think (if lawmaker is of the same party)?
 7. What about the party's position or that of the Chairs or Ranking Members of the relevant committees?
 8. If it's a hard decision, they may try to ascertain your level of commitment--and perhaps wait for your follow up.
- 



Following up on your requests to lawmakers

CULLEN



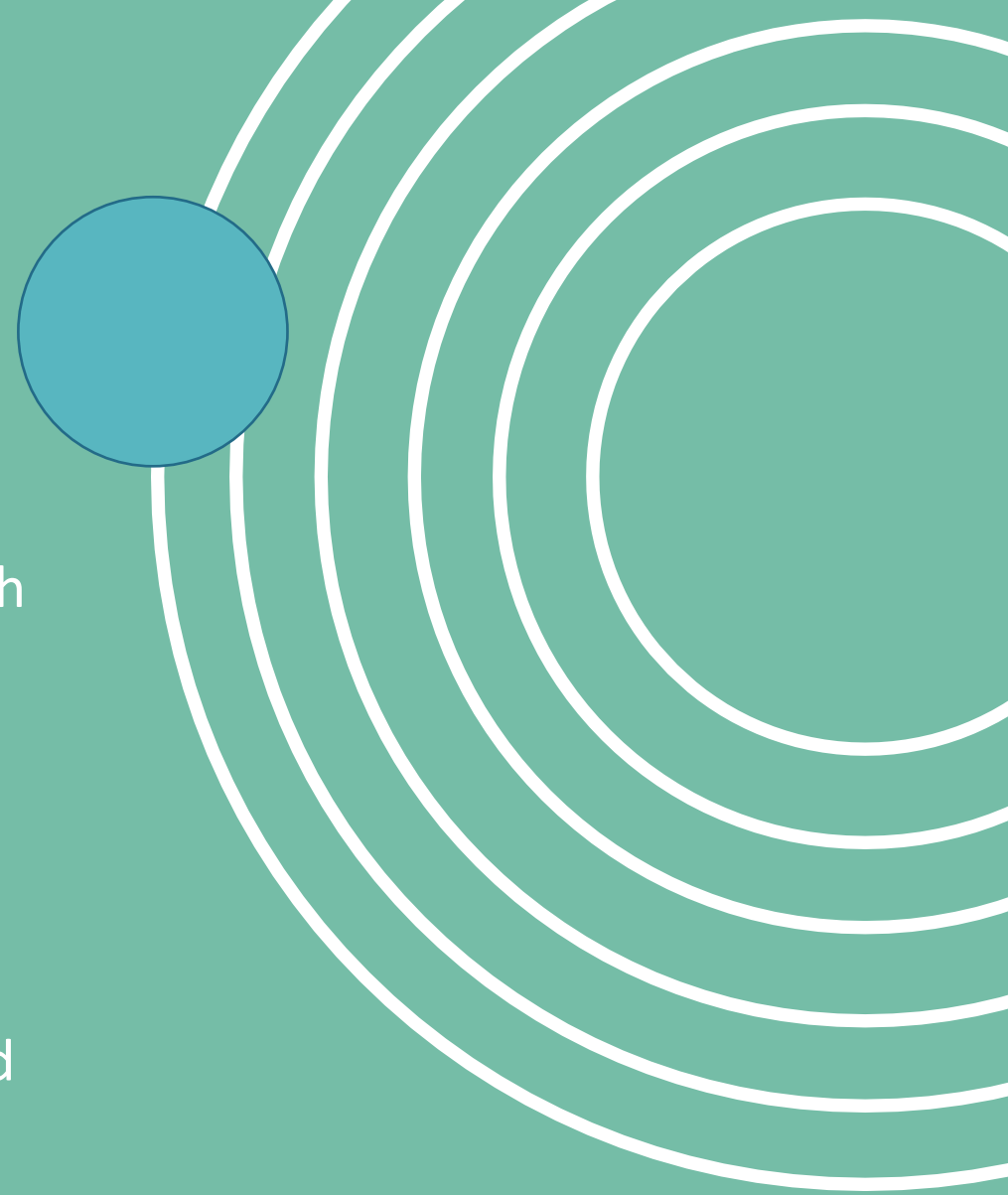
Sharing the work of legislative activism

CULLEN



Relationship Work & Collaboration

- Collaborate! Share the work of advocacy with your colleagues.
- Build coalitions to share the work and advocate with one unified voice.
- It takes time and resources to foster strong relationships and build inclusive coalitions, but it is worth it. No one can go it alone.
- Collective action shares the burden of advocacy and increases your scope and effectiveness.
- Collaboration is most efficient and effective – and it works!





**Lobbying year-round—not
just on Hill Day**

SAMANTHA

SAVE THE DATE

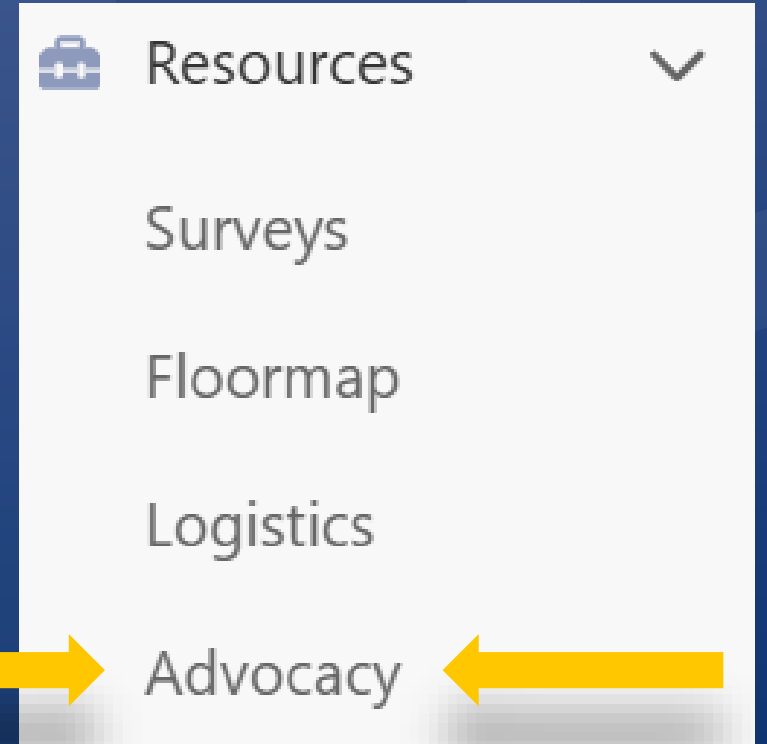
***Virtual* Capitol Hill Day:
September 17**



ENDHOMELESSNESS.ORG

WHOVA > RESOURCES > ADVOCACY

Engage with our advocacy resources on Whova.



TAKE ACTION TODAY

Prepare to take
action and sign
up for our
Advocacy Alerts.



ENDHOMELESSNESS.ORG

TAKE ACTION TO ADVANCE A SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED BUDGET

FY2026 Federal Budget Resource Series

Help the Alliance advocate for increased federal funding — and reject cuts to vital programs — using the resources below.

Alliance Resources

Budget Impact Spreadsheets

Take Action



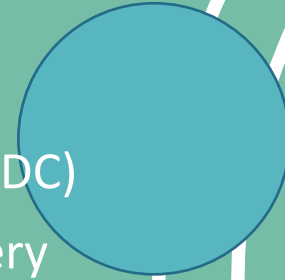
National Alliance to
END HOMELESSNESS

ENDHOMELESSNESS.ORG

ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISE 1

Equal Access Rule (in the Representative's office, in Washington, DC)

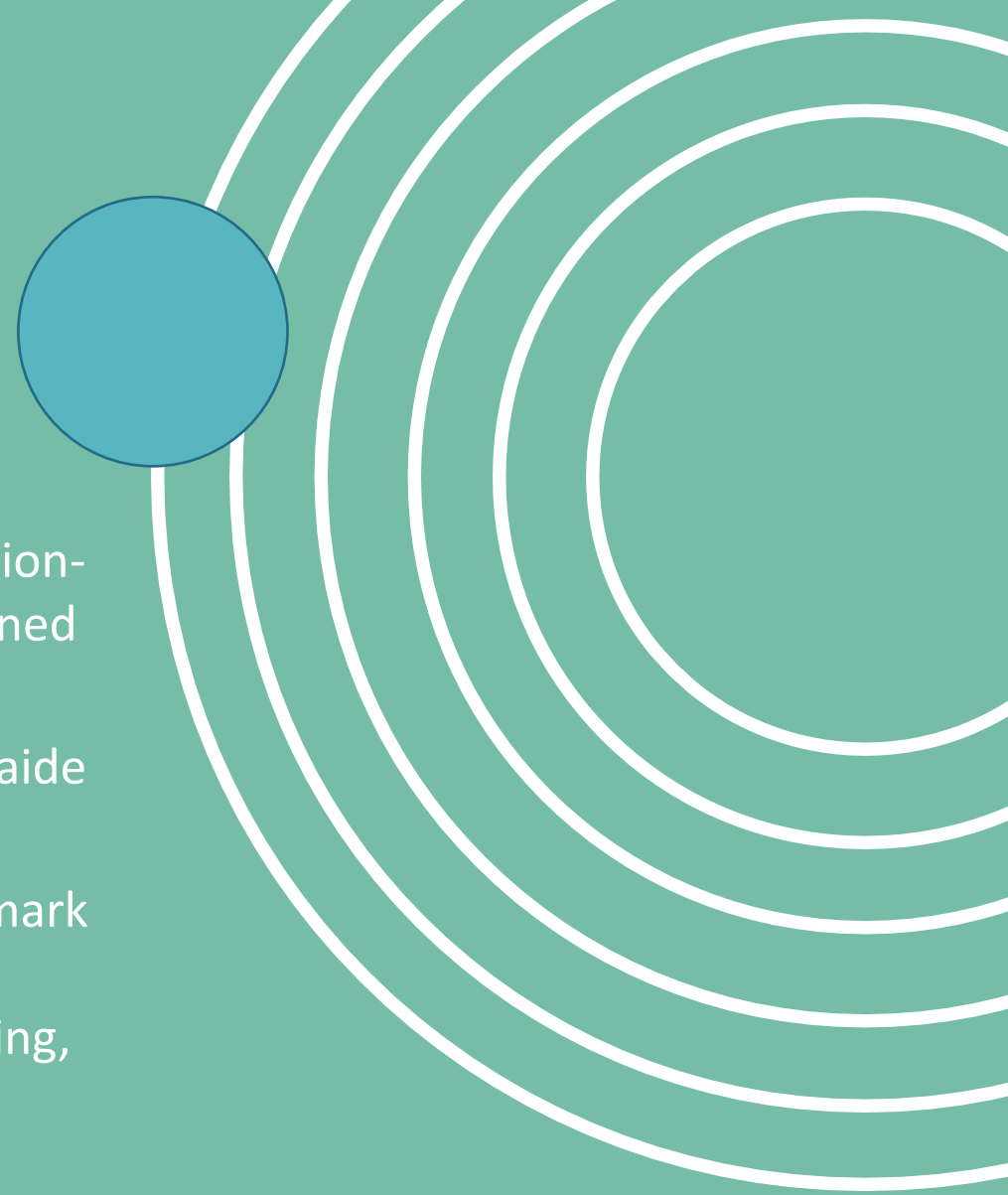
- Target: A moderate Northeastern House Republican who is very religious and generally tries to be supportive of the Trump Administration because he fears a primary challenge.
- Background: He does not serve on any of our committees. You will meet with his staffer, a senior legislative assistant, who is new to the office but grew up in the district. The staffer has been told that the Equal Access Rule provides special benefits for gender expansive people experiencing homelessness.
- Request: Sign on to a letter to Secretary Turner in favor of retaining the Equal Access Rule.
- Your group includes the CoC director, a local religious leader, and a person with lived experience.



ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISE 2

Block-granting homelessness programs (in one of the Senator's state offices)

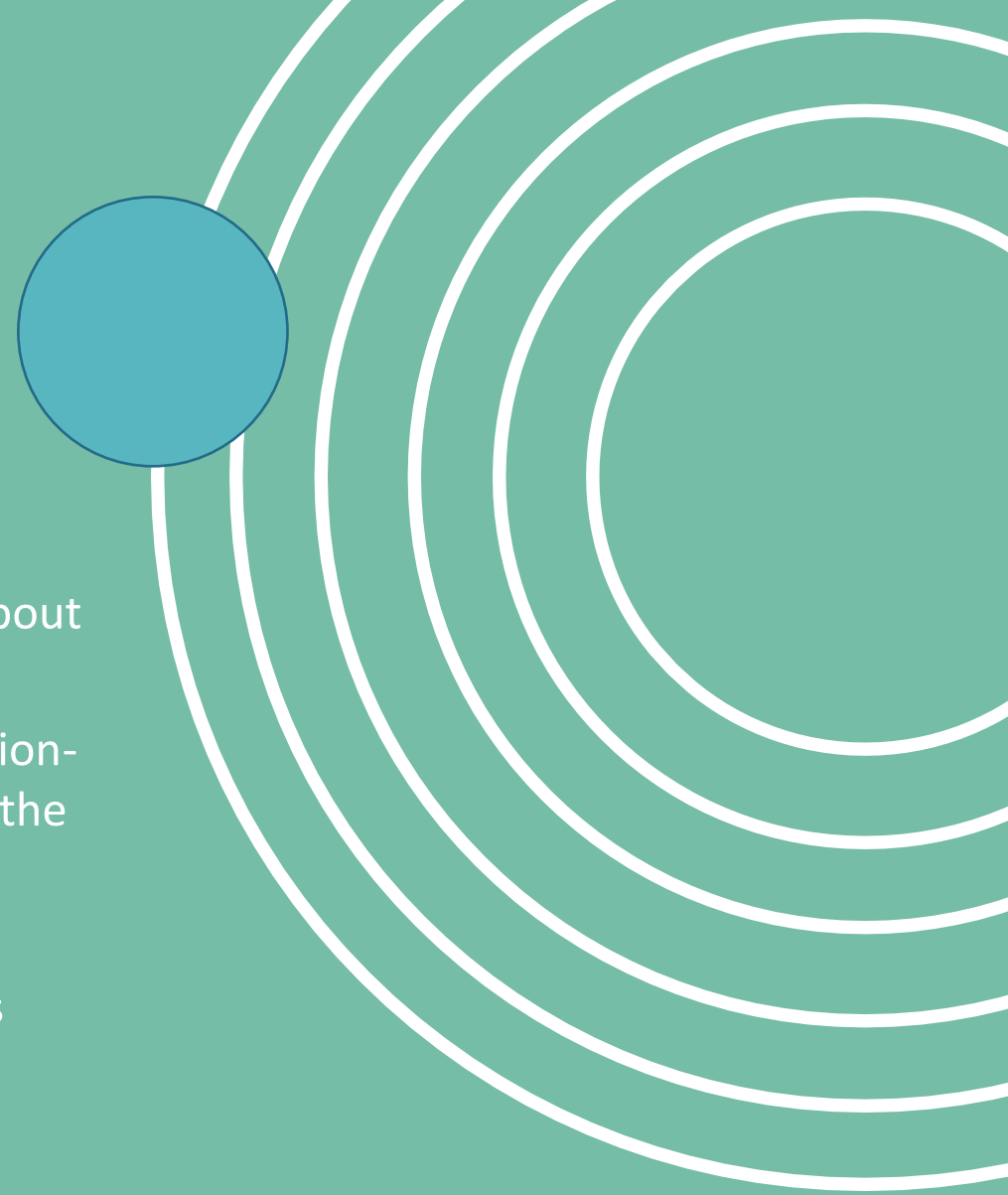
- Target: A conservative Republican on the Senate Transportation-HUD Appropriations Subcommittee who is genuinely concerned by rising chronic homelessness in her state.
- Background: You will meet with her state director, a trusted aide who has worked for the Senator since her days as governor.
- Request: Oppose an amendment coming up in next week's mark up to combine the CoC and HOPWA programs into the ESG program and significantly reduce overall homelessness funding, along the lines proposed by the Trump Administration.
- Your group includes a services provider, a person with lived experience, and the WDC lobbyist of the mayor of the largest city in the state. Abtw, the mayor is a strong ally of the Senator.



ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISE 3

Required services (Zoom)

- Target: A Democratic Senator from a West Coast state where homelessness has reached historic heights. He generally votes right, but, increasingly, he has been speaking sympathetically about local efforts to criminalize homelessness.
- Request: Support a floor amendment to the Senate Transportation-Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill to defund the Administration's promotion of a required services approach to addressing chronic homelessness.
- Your group includes a CoC representative, an academic who has extensively researched Housing First, and a representative of a health insurance carrier which has invested extensively in permanent supportive housing.



ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISE 4

Workforce Compensation (in a common area at the city's largest shelter)

- A moderate Democrat who is a senior member of the House Financial Services Committee. She votes right, but she represents a part of the state that is becoming more conservative, and she doesn't want to appear to her constituents as a big spender.
- Request: Ask her to introduce legislation that would require HUD to calculate increases in the annual cost of living for services, include requests to pay for the calculated increases in the President's annual budget proposals, and then direct that the proceeds from the increases be directed to frontline staff. Your group will meet with a new staffer who had previously interned on the House Financial Services Committee.
- Your group includes three highly-regarded frontline staff from the city's largest services provider.

