



PAA CAPITOL HILL VISIT TOOLKIT 2014

This PAA Capitol Hill Visit Toolkit is designed to support our chapter and affiliate leaders visiting Capitol Hill, but the information may be useful to any parent or community member who wishes to have a voice in legislation that affects public schools and other issues. PAA will provide you with a link to a location on our website where you can download a pdf file of this toolkit and find links to the materials mentioned here.

The Toolkit includes:

- 1 - The purpose of meeting with your elected officials in Washington, DC.
- 2 - How to request a meeting with your elected representative.
- 3 - How to find your way around (includes a map of Capitol Hill).
- 4 - What to do at the meeting and after the meeting.
- 5 - A list of materials mentioned in the Toolkit.
- 6 - A Capitol Hill Visit report form.

1- The purpose of meeting with your elected officials in Washington D.C.

Making personal contact with your elected officials (“Members”) makes a difference in how effective you are in having your issues and concerns heard. Of course, you can meet with Members at their home offices, but it makes a bigger impact if you make an effort to see them in Washington, D.C. and if you also meet with their D.C. point person on education; local office aides tend to be more involved in constituent services and less involved in legislative issues. D.C. aides do most of the research on issues and can be very influential in how the Members vote. Meeting with your representatives:

- Introduces you as a concerned constituent and raises awareness about Parents Across of America.
- Educates Members and staff about PAA’s policy positions on the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA/NCLB) renewal and other education issues.
- Provides them with specific information about how education policies affect your children, their schools, and your community.
- Gives you an opportunity to listen and learn about Members’ views on ESEA/NCLB reform and their reaction to PAA’s positions.
- Helps identify supporters and opponents of PAA’s positions.

Isn't lobbying a pretty questionable activity???

Anyone who contacts his/her representative about an issue is lobbying. You don't have to be a registered lobbyist to lobby Congress. Most lobbying is conducted by everyday people who have a cause, issue, grievance, or interest to press with his/her elected representatives.

As a 501c3 non-profit organization, PAA must limit and report the amount of time and resources that we use for lobbying or in organizing and supporting the lobbying efforts of our members, but this restriction on PAA does not limit what you do as an individual.

Citizen lobbyists have a connection with and impact on their House and Senate Members that many high-powered lobbyists do not: you are constituents. You vote. You are the folks back home. You give a local perspective to issues that Congress considers from a federal perspective. You provide insight into the local impact of federal policy on local governance, institutions, and economies. The stories you tell can have a powerful impact on how the Members end up voting. The message you deliver is hard to ignore.

2 – How to request a meeting.

While you can simply drop by Members' offices, your visit will have a far greater impact if you make an appointment with the Member and/or their education aide. It is important to contact the Member's scheduler at least 3-4 weeks prior to your visit to D.C. Here are some steps:

- If you aren't sure, you can find out who your House and Senate Members are by going to senate.gov or house.gov and click on Senators or Representatives, then your state, or go to www.contactingthecongress.org.
- Most offices require a written request for meetings with the Members. Look on the Member's website for information on how to request a meeting by email, fax or telephone (a "Contact us" or "Request a Meeting" link). If you make appointments by phone, you may still be asked to put your request in writing. *A sample request is below.*
- When making your request to the Member's office, it is important to identify yourself as a constituent and indicate the subject matter you intend to raise, i.e. ESEA reauthorization, NCLB reform, etc. Also, provide other relevant information: mention that you are a member of Parents Across America, a parent of school-age children, in D.C. for the PAA annual conference, etc.
- Limit the number of people in group visits to 3 or 4 people, if possible. Office space in the House and Senate is limited and meetings with large groups often require special arrangements.
- Suggest a date and time range for the meeting. It helps if you can be flexible.
- Follow up if you don't hear back from the Members' office after the request is made. Confirm the appointment the day before meeting. This will provide the office with the opportunity to inform you of any schedule changes or in the nature of the meeting.
- Consider also requesting appointments with members of the House and Senate education committees who are from your state or with whom you may have some relationship or other connection. Look for the list at house.gov or senate.gov under Committees.

Sample Email or Fax Scheduling Request

Dear [Name of Scheduler],

I am a constituent of (Member's name) and a member of Parents Across America. I will be in Washington, D.C. on [date] to participate in PAA's Annual Leadership Conference. I would very much appreciate a meeting with Senator/Congressman [Name] and/or his education staff person to discuss issues relating to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA/NCLB) reauthorization and other education issues. (If there are others attending the meeting with you, add their names.)

A meeting between the hours of [times] on [date] would be ideal. Thank you so much for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely, etc.

3- How to find your way around – see Capitol Hill map next page

Capitol Hill is fairly easy to access by taxi or using Washington D.C.'s excellent transit system. There are three subway stops found within walking distance of the Capitol:

- Union Station – Located at First Street, NW, and Massachusetts Avenue.
- Capitol South – Located at First Street between C and D Streets, SE.
- Federal Center, SW – Located at the southwest corner of Third and D Streets, SW.

Additional information on riding the subway, which is called the Metro, can be found at wmata.com.

There is very little public parking available near the Capitol. The nearest public parking facility is at Union Station, to the north of the Capitol. Metered street parking is found along the Mall to the west of the Capitol.

In general, Senate offices are **north** of the Capitol building and House offices are **south** of the Capitol (see map next page).

Senate Office Locations: In *all* Senate office numbers, the **first** number indicates the floor.

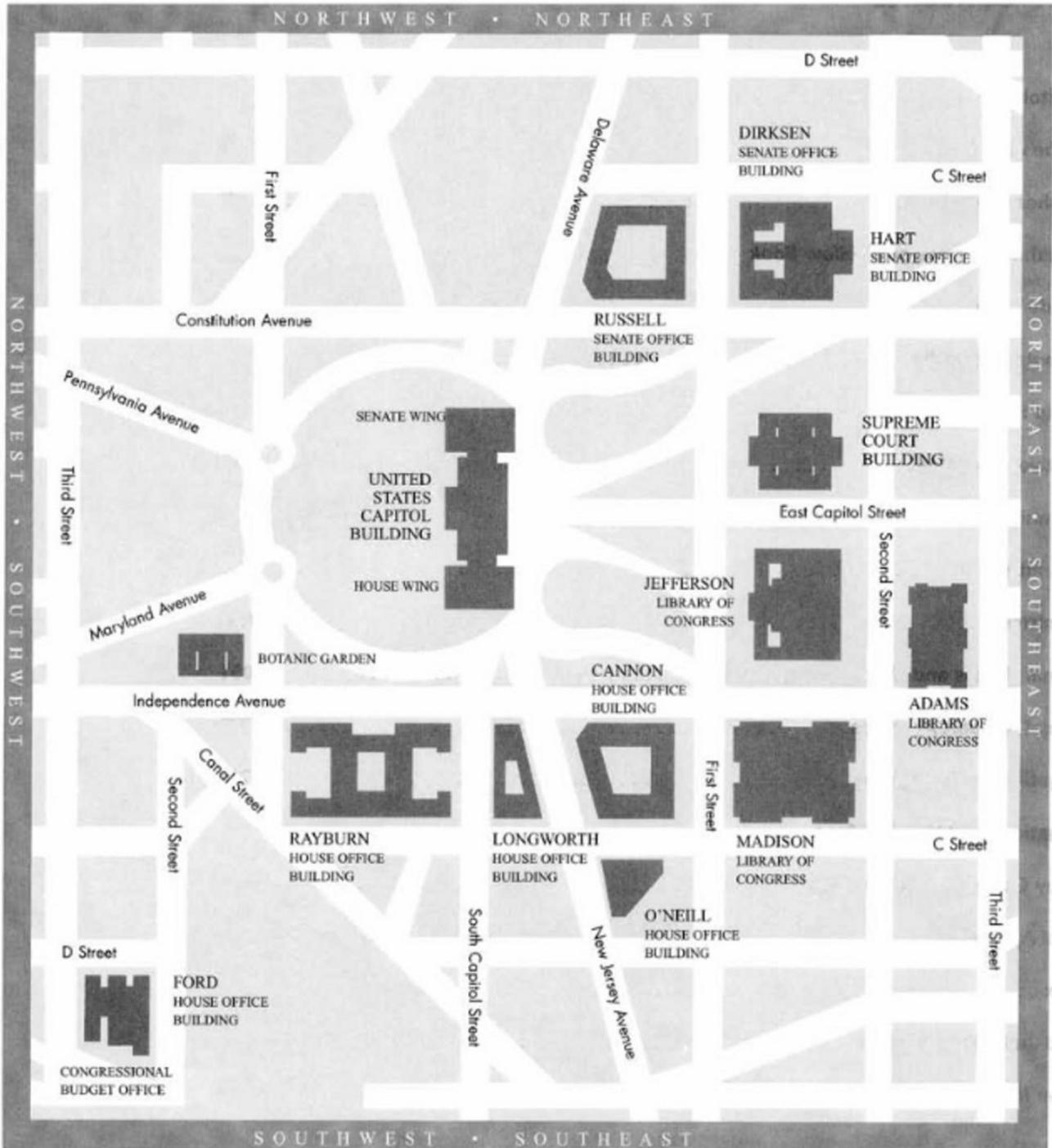
- SR=Senate **Russell** Office Building
- SD=Senate **Dirksen** Office Building
- SH=Senate **Hart** Office Building

House Office Locations:

- 3-digit room nos. with CHOB suffix=**Cannon** House Office Bldg. The **first** number indicates the floor.
- 4-digit room nos. beginning with 1 and LHOB prefix=**Longworth** House Office Bldg. The **second** number indicates the floor.
- 4-digit room nos. beginning with 2 and RHOB prefix=**Rayburn** House Office Bldg. The **second** number indicates the floor.

Plan your visits carefully to minimize running around! These office buildings are somewhat far apart by foot and some are ENORMOUS inside! Organize your visits so that you are not running from one building to the next or one side of a building to the other side and up and down floors. Ask the guards or check plaques on each floor and at entrances to see where you need to go.

MAP OF CAPITOL HILL



4 – What to do at the meeting and after the meeting.

What to bring

- A camera (your phone will do)! You'll want to get a **photo** with the Member to tweet and Facebook!
- Use the materials PAA provides to prepare a small information packet for each office visit and bring one or two extra in case additional people sit in on the meeting. BE AWARE that there are **limits to the amount of paper** that can be brought into any Congressional office. More information about prohibited items can be found on the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center web site, visitthecapitol.gov. Key advice: *travel light!*
- Include your contact information; use the downloadable brochure PAA provides; you can add your information on the back of the brochure.
- Make sure that the 1-page issue summary PAA provided is on top of the packet.
- For your own use (but not to hand out to the Member) bring the key **talking points** and questions for the Members provided by PAA. If you want to add one or two points that are not on our list but are especially important to you, keep the total number of points you present to 3 or 4.
- Be prepared with specific examples that illustrate why the issues you raise are important back home. Be prepared with at least **one specific, compelling story** that illustrates your concern or issue. Tying legislation to local issues and the stories of real people grabs Members' attention.
- Have some paper for making notes.

What to say and do at the meeting

- You should expect to meet for about 15 minutes, so make sure you can get your main points across in that amount of time!
- Arrive a few minutes early to your meeting, even though it is not uncommon for the Member or legislative aides to arrive late for meeting. All are subject to hectic and tight schedules and are often times interrupted by late-breaking emergencies.
- Introduce yourself and thank the Member or legislative aide for arranging time in their schedule to visit with you. If you have any personal, professional or political ties with the member, share them.
- Explain what brings you to Washington, then segue into the topic of discussion. Keep your discussion focused on the PAA talking points and be considerate of the clock. Be sure to share the stories you prepared to illustrate your points.
- Ask if the Member shares the concerns you express. Listen carefully to what is being said. There is a big difference between “I agree and will support you,” and “I’m really happy to learn your views. You’ve given me a new perspective on this issue, and I will certainly consider your views.” The first reply is a solid supporter; the second is undecided or an evasion.
- Make a note of the Member's responses to your questions.
- When you are asked questions, provide honest, truthful answers. If you don’t have an answer, there is nothing wrong with saying, “I don’t know.” Don’t get caught giving incorrect

information. It reflects on your credibility. But if you don't know, take note of the question and **follow up** with the correct information when you return home.

- If there is follow-up required on your part, provide a time frame on when they can expect to hear from you. If there is any follow up required of the congressional/senate office, try to obtain a deadline on when you can expect to hear from them.
- Volunteer to provide local information on legislation that comes up for action by Congress. If your Member sits on a relevant committee, such as the Education and Workforce Committee, volunteer to suggest questions to be raised during hearings. You can be a valuable resource to a legislative aide who knows the policy issues but is not familiar with the state or district.
- If you don't meet with the Member, be sure to be polite to the staffer; they will have input into the Member's decision making.

After the Meeting

- There will be an opportunity to debrief on your visit with other PAA members at the beginning of the PAA conference. We will be able to compare notes on the Members' level of commitment to PAA policy positions and what commitments were made to provide follow up information.
- It is very important to send a "thank you" note to the Member and, where appropriate, to the legislative aide staffing the Member, for arranging their schedules to meet with you. Briefly go over the issues covered and commitments made. Also, enclose/attach any information you may have promised to deliver.
- If the Member's office fails to deliver on any follow-up they promised, reach out again with a gentle reminder and establish a new timeline. Be persistent but friendly.
- Send a follow-up thank you letter (sample below).
- On the last page of this toolkit is a report form; please fill one out for each visit you made and share with PAA at the debriefing session.

Sample "Thank You" Letter to Member/Aide Following Capitol Hill Meeting

Honorable (Name) or Senator (Name)

Dear Representative/Senator/Staff:

Thank you for meeting with me during my recent visit to Washington, D.C. I appreciated the opportunity to discuss Parents Across America's position on reforming and renewing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (NCLB). As the legislation continues to progress through the legislative process, I hope we can count on your support for our positions.

*As we discussed, the reauthorization of NCLB needs greater emphasis on improving the **quality** of our schools. Unfortunately, current proposals over rely on high stakes testing, privatization including continued rapid charter school expansion, and unfunded mandates that have proved harmful to schools and to high-needs student populations, and have no backing in research. The evidence is clear that NCLB has not improved academic achievement or student outcomes.*

I look forward to continuing to work with your office to keep you informed of educational developments in our district (or state). If I can ever provide you with other assistance, please feel free to call on me.

Sincerely, Name, Address, Phone

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PAA CAPITOL HILL VISIT HANDOUTS/MATERIALS 2014

For you

PAA Capitol Hill Toolkit

Information on prohibited items for Hill visit <http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/plan-visit/prohibited-items#.U85z-v4t85A>

Talking points 2014

To present to the Member

1-page issue summary

PAA brochure

PAA Position Paper – Data Privacy

PAA Position Paper – Testing

PAA Position Paper – Charter Schools

PAA Fact Sheet - Ignoring Poverty Doesn't Work

PAA Position Paper - PAA Opposes S.2304 (charter school expansion) – for Senators

Facts/Research Support PAA's ESEA Positions

PAA CAPITOL HILL VISIT REPORT FORM

Your Name: _____

State _____

Contact Information: Phone: _____

Email: _____

Who Else Attended the Meeting With You (if any)

Which Issues Did You Cover:

____ NCLB Reform

____ Charter Schools

____ High Stakes Standardized Testing

____ Student Data Privacy

____ Other _____

Which member of Congress/Senator _____

With whom did you meet: _____ Senator

____ Representative

____ Senate aide (name/position)

____ Congressional aide (name/position)

Other _____

How Would You Rate This Member on the PAA Supporter Scale?

____ - 1 (Opposed to PAA Issues)

____ 0 (Neutral or Uninformed of Issues)

____ +1 (Supporter of PAA Issues)

____ +2 (Advocate of PAA Issues)

____ +3 (Leader on PAA Issues)

____ Not sure

(Use the back of this report form for answers to the following.)

Briefly describe how the meeting went. What do you think was accomplished?

What, if any, follow up is required?

For Representatives or Senators who were negative or not sure, is there a probability that they can be persuaded to support PAA issues in the future and, if so, under what conditions?