**Advocating for Mentoring Toolkit**

*Your guide to advocating for high-quality mentoring!*

**Introduction**

From funding for youth mentoring programs to keeping children in mentoring relationships safe, there are many important reasons to share your support for mentoring and your expertise about what makes mentoring successful. This advocacy toolkit will provide you with some basic resources to help you communicate with Congress, engage online and learn to effectively advocate for mentoring.

Your advocacy on behalf of mentoring makes a significant impact on the policies that elected officials consider and create. They can produce public policy that can enhance high-quality mentoring and also secure funding for critical mentoring programs. **However, they cannot effectively craft policy without input from their constituents and the people who know the most about mentoring**!

Elected officials need people from across the field to engage with them about their own experiences with mentoring and express their support for legislative policies that affect their communities. **You don’t need to be an expert in legislative policy in order to be a mentoring advocate, you just need to have a passion for mentoring!**

*9 million kids in America are growing up without a mentor, you can take action today to change that.*

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**Who Represents Me?**

Before we get to communicating with elected officials, it’s important to know who represents you. You can find your federal officials [here.](https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/map)

* You have one (1) U.S. Representative representing your community in Congress. S/he may be referred to as Congressman / Congresswoman, Representative or more generally, Member of Congress. Representatives serve in the United States House of Representatives or, simply, the House.
* You have two (2) U.S. Senators representing your entire state. They are most often referred to as Senator.
* “Member of Congress” is generally used to refer to both Representatives and Senators. For instance: ‘Contact your Members of Congress’ generally means contact your Representative and both of your Senators, while “Contact your House Member” means you should focus on your Representative.

**When is Congress in Session? Can I Contact Congress Anytime?**

[The House of Representatives](http://www.majorityleader.gov/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/2016_ANNUAL_CALENDAR.pdf) and the [Senate](https://democrats.senate.gov/2016-senate-calendar-114th-second-session/#.V08BMfkrLIU) have Congressional calendars that set out their annual agendas for when legislators will be working in Washington, DC or in their home districts. When Members of Congress are working back home, these weeks are called district work periods or Congressional recess. But don’t let the association with playtime in school fool you – legislators are often busy meeting with constituents during their “recess” periods.

It’s helpful to determine when and where your communications with legislators should occur, but you can always contact the advocacy and government relations team at MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership with any questions:

* **Abbie Evans**
Director of Government Relations

aevans@mentoring.org

* **Adriane Alicea**
Government Relations Manager

aalicea@mentoring.org

**Take Action Online**

Social media is an important way to communicate with your elected officials. Members of Congress use social media to spread awareness about issues they care about, update constituents on events happening in their districts and to discuss public policy. They also use it to highlight organizations or constituent groups that meet with them, invite them to events or host them at their own centers or headquarters. **Elected officials *love* sharing photos of themselves with constituents!**

Here are some ways that you can quickly take action on social media:

**Twitter**

Advocates can use twitter to alert Members of Congress about legislation or mentoring opportunities that are important to their communities and states. Tagging a Member of Congress using their twitter handle in your posts is one of the most effective ways to ensure that their office sees your message. Typically, Congressional staff manage most Members of Congress’ social media accounts and will alert the legislator when they receive a large amount of tweets regarding a specific issue.

Below are some sample tweets that might help get you started. We encourage you to include photos and stories from your own experiences in your tweets.

**Tip:** Check MENTOR’s [Advocacy pages](http://www.mentoring.org/get-involved/advocacy/) to see if any new or specific sample social media messages have been posted for you to use.

**Sample Mentoring Tweets**

* **[@MoC Twitter Handle]**, Youth who face opportunity gaps but who have #mentors are 55% more likely to graduate from college. Please invest in #mentoring programs! #MentorIRL
* 9 million kids could benefit from a mentor and they are hoping that Congress invests in #mentoring programs that will impact their life outcomes**. [@MoC Twitter Handle] #MentorIRL**
* **[@MoC Twitter Handle],** did u know that **[Insert organization]** works to support #mentoring in **[state/district]**? **[Insert organization]** wants u to invest in #mentoring, too! #MentorIRL
* **[@MoC Twitter Handle],** we need a strong investment in children and #mentoring, please support robust funding for #mentoring programs. #MentorIRL

**Issue-specific Tweets**

MENTOR has several legislative priorities regarding [child safety](http://www.mentoring.org/get-involved/advocacy/policy-agenda/child-safety/) and [funding for mentoring programs](http://www.mentoring.org/get-involved/advocacy/policy-agenda/public-funding-for-mentoring/). Below are some sample tweets to support the [Child Protection Improvements Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/4073?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22child+protection+improvements+act%22%5D%7D&resultIndex=1) (CPIA), which is pending legislation in the United States Congress.

* **[@MoC Twitter Handle]**, #KeepKidsSafe by providing access to FBI fingerprint background checks that are critical in mentoring relationships, take action on #CPIA today.
* **[@MoC Twitter Handle]**, Become a champion of safe mentoring relationships and #KeepKidsSafe by taking action on #CPIA.
* **[@MoC Twitter Handle]** Child abuse in youth serving organizations can be prevented by FBI fingerprint background checks for volunteers. #KeepKidsSafe by supporting #CPIA.

**Facebook**

Advocates can use Facebook to alert Members of Congress about legislation or mentoring programs that are important to their communities and states. Remember to tag your Member of Congress’ Facebook page in your posts in order to ensure that they see your message.

Whenever possible, utilize photos and graphics to attract the attention of like-minded stakeholders and elected officials, alike. You might want to share your own photos along with your message of support for mentoring opportunities with Members of Congress. Congressional staff manage the Facebook accounts for most elected officials and will inform them of important trends on their page.

**Sample Facebook Posts**

* Students who meet regularly with their mentors are 52% less likely to skip a day of school than their peers. Congress please invest in mentoring to help youth stay in school **[MoC Facebook Page]**. #MentorIRL
* Young adults who face an opportunity gap but have a mentor are 55% more likely to go to college than those who do not have a mentor. Congress help close the mentoring gap by investing in mentoring **[MoC Facebook page]**. #MentorIRL
* 9 million kids could benefit from the presence of a caring adult. Congress you can change that by supporting mentoring programs in your **[State/District]** **[MoC Facebook Page]**. #MentorIRL

**Instagram**

Instagram can be used to highlight personal mentoring stories, photos of mentoring programs, events or meetings. Any time you participate in any of these things you should consider posting it to Instagram and tagging a Member of Congress. Be sure to also include #mentoring in your post.

**Tip:** Use fun social media tools like #TBT (“throwback Thursday”) to repost meetings, events and other important advocacy engagements.

**Sample Instagram Posts**

* **[Organization Name]** hosted a **[EXAMPLE: Roundtable of adults who mentor youth]** today to discuss the importance of community engagement in mentoring. We are excited to continue working with stakeholders in our district to make mentoring a priority.
* Today I met with **[MoC Name]** to discuss investing in #mentoring programs in our district. We are excited that **[MoC Name]** supports this critical investment in young people.
* I #mentor a child because I want to close the opportunity gap that exists for vulnerable children or **[Insert your reason]**.
* #TBT to last July when our **[Your organization]** traveled to Washington, DC to talk to our Member of Congress about why #mentoring matters to our community. **[MoC Name]**, we applaud your continued support for #mentoring!

**Email**

Emails can be used to notify Members of Congress about your support for pending legislation, funding for mentoring or to demonstrate the impact mentoring has in your community. Congressional offices receive thousands of emails, letters and phone calls a week and try to respond to every message. It’s important that you keep your message concise.

Staff will generally compile a weekly or monthly list that provides their boss with data on the largest trends in correspondence. Especially when there is an upcoming vote on pending legislation, Members of Congress will ask their staff to inform them of how many emails they received regarding the issue. For example, if a legislator receives 400 emails regarding support for the Child Protection Improvements Act and 340 phone calls asking the Member of Congress to join the House Mentoring Caucus, the Congressional staff will report to the legislator the vast support an issue is receiving in their community. This will help prompt the Member of Congress to support legislation or become more involved in an issue since they now understand how critical an issue is to their community.

MENTOR will alert you via [email](http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/51101/p/salsa/web/common/public/signup?signup_page_KEY=7910) when there is a critical time to take action through email and our action center allows you to simply enter your basic information and then send a message to your Members of Congress.

You can utilize MENTOR’s template messages and add in personalized information about a mentoring relationship you have or a mentoring program in your community. In addition, you could write about how funding for mentoring might directly affect your program or community.

**Email Example**

Dear [Representative or Senator]:

As a mentoring supporter who cares about youth safety, I'm writing to ask you cosponsor the Child Protection Improvements Act (CPIA) (H.R. 4073 and S. 2332).

CPIA is bipartisan, carries no taxpayer expense and is not a mandate. It simply ensures universal access to FBI fingerprint background checks for all organizations serving vulnerable populations (including youth, the elderly and individuals with disabilities) that wish to use them.

Mentoring programs – and youth-serving nonprofits across the country – need access to national FBI fingerprint background checks to make informed decisions about potential volunteers wishing to work with children and youth. Comprehensive background checks are especially critical in mentoring relationships where the child and adult are often unsupervised.

CPIA is necessary because only about half of states currently provide access to national FBI checks to youth-serving organizations. The safety of children and youth in the care of nonprofits is of vital importance and cannot be left to chance.

During a pilot created by the PROTECT Act, it was found that nearly 6 percent of more than 100,000 volunteers whose fingerprints were run through the FBI criminal database were found to have had criminal records of concern. Of those with records of concern:

* Over 41 percent had records in states other than where they were applying to volunteer;
* 23 percent used a different name than the one holding the record of concern; and,
* Six percent applied with a different date of birth.
* Additionally, over 53 percent of the applicants screened during the pilot indicated they did not have a record, but one was uncovered.

Without the national fingerprint check those records may not have been found and the youth-serving organizations that participated in the pilot would not have been able to make informed decisions about matching volunteers with children in their programs. CPIA would ensure all organizations could utilize these checks as part of their screening process.

Finally, it’s important to note that having a criminal record should not automatically prevent an individual from volunteering. The disclosure of records through a screening simply allows for open and informed dialogue and decision-making with the individual and the organization through which they are trying to volunteer.

Thank you for your attention to this critical bill.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

**Take Action on the Phone**

**Calling your Congressional Office**

One incredibly effective way advocates can engage with Congress is by calling their legislators offices about key issues and votes. Congressional offices receive hundreds of phone calls a week so it’s important to remember a few key points when interacting with their offices:

**Know Before You Call**

* If relevant, try to have the bill title and number ready. You can find that information [here.](https://www.congress.gov/)
* A staff assistant or intern will answer the phone. They often will have little knowledge of the issue you want to discuss. It is most effective to be concise. They receive such a high volume of calls it is unlikely they will want to discuss the bill in detail.
* The staff assistant or intern will ask for your full name and zip code in order to assess whether you live in their district. Most offices only keep track of constituents who call from their districts, if you are not their constituent they will direct you to your Member of Congress’ office.
* The staff assistant will tally how many phone calls they received for and against certain issues within the week and alert the Member of Congress.
* Occasionally, if you are representing a large organization in your district and have further questions the staff assistant will patch you through to the legislative assistant or other Congressional aide who is responsible for that issue in the office.
* Typical requests to make of Congressional offices via the phone:
	+ Co-sponsor a bill
	+ Protect funding for mentoring specific bill or program
	+ Join the House Mentoring Caucus
	+ Vote yes on a specific bill

MENTOR will always alert you when there is a timely and critical time to act on a specific bill or issue, but you can contact your legislators at any time about any issue.

**Sample Phone Call Scripts**

Below are some sample phone call scripts you can use as a guide for taking action:

**Co-Sponsor Request** (i.e., you want your legislator to support – “cosponsor” – a specific piece of legislation)

Hello. My name is **[Your Name]** and I’m calling to ask that **[Representative’s Name]** co-sponsor H.R. 4073, The Child Protection Improvements Act, which will provide access to FBI fingerprint background checks to nonprofit youth-serving organizations wishing to screen volunteers working with children and to help keep our kids safe. **[Insert any relevant short personal or organization story here].**

My zip code is **[Your Zip Code]**.

Thank you!

**Support for Funding Request** (i.e., a funding bill – called appropriations bills – and/or a specific program you want funded by Congress)

Hello. My name is **[Your Name]** and I’m calling to ask that **[Member of Congress’ Name]** protects at minimum $90 million dollars to support the Youth Mentoring Grant in 2017 Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations bill. Funding for mentoring is critical and ensures that youth have access to a consistent and caring adult in their lives, thereby supporting healthy individuals, families and communities**.  [Insert any relevant short personal or organization story here]**.

My zip code is **[Your Zip Code].**

Thank you!

**Taking Action In-Person**

**Scheduling Meetings with Members of Congress**

In-person meetings are an important part of advocacy and provide Members of Congress and their staff the opportunity to have a meaningful conversation with you about mentoring opportunities. It gives them a deeper understanding of why this issue is important to people in their community and allows them to ask any questions about mentoring’s efficacy, use and desired outcomes. Remember these tips can be used for scheduling a meeting with Members of Congress when they are in Washington, DC or when they are in their district offices.

**Step by Step Guide for Scheduling a Congressional Meeting**

You can call the Congressional office and ask to speak to the scheduler or you can visit the legislators’ official website to fill out an online meeting request form.

1. Most Members of Congress have section on their website titled “Contact” with a dropdown menu option to “Schedule a Meeting.” Here you will enter relevant information regarding your meeting request. If the Member does not have a section on their website call their scheduler. State your name, the name of your organization (if relevant) and the meeting topic so that the staff has a clear understanding of what you want to discuss.
2. Congressional offices receive a number of meeting requests so do not be disappointed if you do not receive a response quickly. You will most likely need to follow-up via email or phone to see if your meeting request can be accommodated.
3. If the legislator isn’t available, but their staff is, take the opportunity to meet with them. Staff play a critical role in shaping the policy that affects mentoring. Building relationships with Congressional staff is just as important as creating them with the legislator.

**Before the Meeting**

* Visit the [Advocacy](http://www.mentoring.org/get-involved/advocacy/) page of MENTOR’s website in order to view the current legislative agenda**.** This will provide you with talking points on specific legislation to use during your meeting and with materials to leave behind for the Member of Congress.
* Think about personal or organizational connections to mentoring to share during the meeting. Congressional staff like to hear personal stories about mentoring and about how the issue affects the people in their district. It helps them better understand why the issue you’re discussing should be a priority for their boss.
* If you have any questions regarding specific legislation, please don’t hesitate to contact the MENTOR advocacy and government relations team.

**Tips for your Meeting**

If you’re meeting in the Washington, DC office, remember that Congressional buildings are secure and require all visitors to pass through security at entrances. At certain times of the day security delays can last 5-10 minutes. Be sure to leave yourself enough time to arrive at the legislator’s office 3-5 minutes before your scheduled meeting.

**During your meeting**:

* Introduce yourself and, if applicable, have everyone in your group introduce themselves and where they are from.
* Be open to chit-chat – especially if it’s about things going on back home – but be mindful of your time. Hill meeting are usually brief (15-20 minutes on average).
* Come prepared to tell your story (why you care about youth mentoring) and to cover the issues you wanted to cover. If a group of you are meeting together, determine before the meeting who will cover what topic.
* Be sure to talk about activities going on in your state and communities – Members of Congress want to learn more about what’s going on in the cities and states they represent.
* Allow time for questions.
* Provide the legislator and/or their staff with supplementary materials that summarize your key points before you leave. Be sure to include your contact information!
* Be flexible! Most of your meetings will happen in the legislator’s office (whether s/he is present or not). But Hill offices are hectic and you may be asked to stand in the hallway to conduct your meeting, or even hold the meeting with the legislator on the go! Roll with it!
* Don’t forget to snap a picture – you’re participating in the democratic process! We strongly encourage all advocates to post their pictures on social media using the hashtag #MentoringAdvocate and/or #MentorIRL

Tip: To further your social media impact, be sure to include your Members of Congress in your post. Many will retweet and repost messages from constituents.

**After Your Meeting**

* Send a thank you email or card to the Member of Congress and the Congressional aide you met with to express your appreciation for their time. This is a great opportunity to *briefly* remind them of what you covered during your meeting.
* Contact MENTOR’s advocacy and government relations team about your meeting(s). MENTOR can help determine the best follow-up actions for you to take.
* Follow-up with the aide 2-3 weeks after the meeting to assess what actions are being taken by the Member of Congress in regards to the topics you covered. Continue to engage with the aide even when you don’t have a specific ask for them. Fostering this relationship is important so that you don’t only contact the office when you need them to act on something.

**How to Engage with District Staff**

While the staff in a legislator’s Washington, DC office handle mostly legislative policy, having a relationship with district office staff is important, too. The district staff works to support federal grants, conduct casework on behalf of constituents on federal issues, represent the legislator when they are in DC and their work often intersects with legislative policy. Here are some ways to engage with district staff:

* Invite district staff to events your organization is hosting – and keep inviting them over time!
* Encourage district staff to sign up for your organization’s e-newsletters.
* Invite district staffers to be on a planning committee or other community-engagement opportunities for your organization.
* Schedule meetings during the district work week (a.k.a., Congressional recess) to meet with your Member of Congress. They often have a little bit more time to spend with constituents during district work week (though this is not always the case).
* Keep communication open regarding your mentoring program so that district staff are aware of meetings and events in the community.

**Site Visits**

Site visits, such as inviting a legislator and/or their staff to visit a mentoring program in a local Boys & Girls Club, can be an effective tool in expressing the positive impact that mentoring has on youth and in your community. It can also provide the legislator and their staff an opportunity to interact with mentors, mentees and other staff in the mentoring field.

**How to Invite a Member of Congress on Site Visit**

1. Find out when Congress is in “recess” to determine when your legislator(s) will be back home in the district or state. (Congressional Calendars for [The House of Representatives](http://www.majorityleader.gov/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/2016_ANNUAL_CALENDAR.pdf) and the [Senate](https://democrats.senate.gov/2016-senate-calendar-114th-second-session/#.V08BMfkrLIU))
2. Using the “Scheduling Congressional Meetings” section of this guide invite your Member of Congress to visit your program. In this letter you should express:
	1. Several options for dates you would like them to visit during scheduled district work periods (recess).
	2. Specific information about your program.
	3. The purpose for a site visit. If you’re asking the legislator to visit during a special event – maybe a mentor recruitment fair or school mentoring awards program – be very clear about that in your request.
3. Follow-up with the legislator’s scheduler and assess whether the Member of Congress or district staff will attend. If neither can attend, try to find alternative dates that work. Do not be disappointed if they are not able to immediately schedule a date, just remember to follow-up.
4. Once the visit is scheduled, consider working with the Member of Congress’ communications staff on a plan for garnering press for the visit. The communications staff will be able to work with you to determine what level of press they would like for the site visit. Some ideas for possible press include creating a press release or media advisory. (Note: if press wouldn’t normally attend your event and/or you don’t think it’s appropriate, tell the legislator’s staff that up front.)
5. Inform your staff and any other relevant stakeholders (volunteers, mentees parents, etc.) that the Member of Congress will be visiting and prepare them to answer questions if appropriate. Be sure to remind all adults who may interact with the legislator that it is never appropriate to make partisan remarks or challenge them on a position, vote or issue not relevant to their visit. Keep the visit educational and respectful. You can always schedule a separate meeting to discuss specific legislative issues in private and in greater detail.
6. Create materials to send to the legislator’s staff before the visit. And, most importantly send them a schedule of the site visit. See below for a sample agenda for a site visit:

**Sample Agenda for site Visit**

1. CEO and select staff/volunteers greet the legislator in the lobby. *(This should be a small group of people who can say hello and introduce themselves. If young people are present, consider inviting one or two to join you to greet the legislator.)*
2. Tour the facility. CEO will introduce the legislator to a few mentors and their mentees to talk about their relationship and answer questions.
3. 15 minute small-group meeting with legislator and select staff and volunteers to discuss their personal experiences and to cover the desired outcome(s) of the program. *(You should prepare what makes the most sense for your program in terms of topics.)*
4. Group photo with young people and legislator. *(Thank the legislator for visiting and be sure to provide a folder of materials for the Congressional aide.)*

Send a thank you letter to the Member of Congress and their staff for arranging the visit and keep in communication with the office.

**Additional Questions?**

If you have any questions regarding any of the materials in this toolkit or would like support or feedback on mentoring advocacy please contact Abbie Evans, Director of Government Relations at MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership at aevans@mentoring.org.

**Additional Resources**

* [www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org) – Our site provides research, statistics and advocacy actions around high-quality mentoring.
* [www.Congress.gov](http://www.Congress.gov) – Research legislation and events occurring in Congress.
* [www.Senate.gov](http://www.Senate.gov) – See the latest updates in the U.S. Senate and search for your Senator.
* [www.House.gov](http://www.House.gov) – See the latest updates in the U.S. House of Representatives and search for your U.S. Representative.