

Members of Congress Want to Hear from YOU



Members value staying in touch with constituents...

- Constituent conversations guide policymaking
- Reelection hinges on their ability to serve the constituents who vote them into office
- Members trust their staff to help them listen to constituents, so advocates should not be surprised if they meet with staff instead of a Member

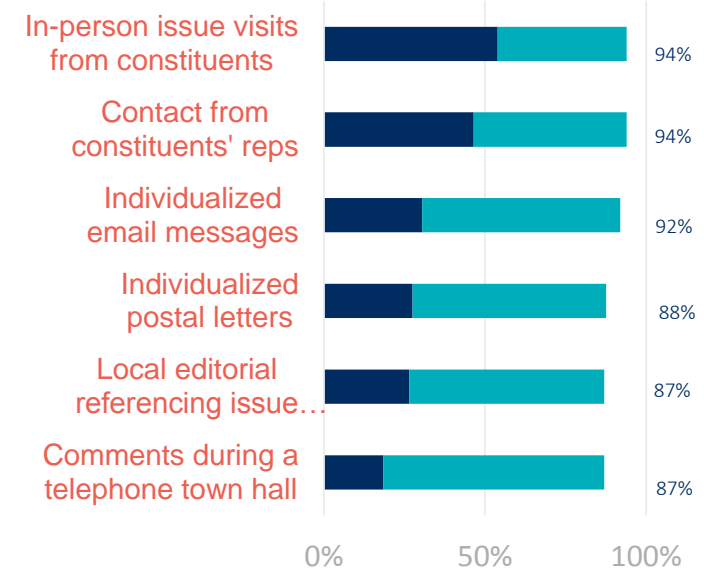


...and find personal communications persuasive...

- Individual letters and e-mails can have greater influence on member decision-making than form letters
- Advocates should focus on sending more personal messages to their member of Congress to capture their individual voice or perspective



...but visitors with first-hand knowledge of policy impacts are most compelling



**National Association
for Behavioral Healthcare**

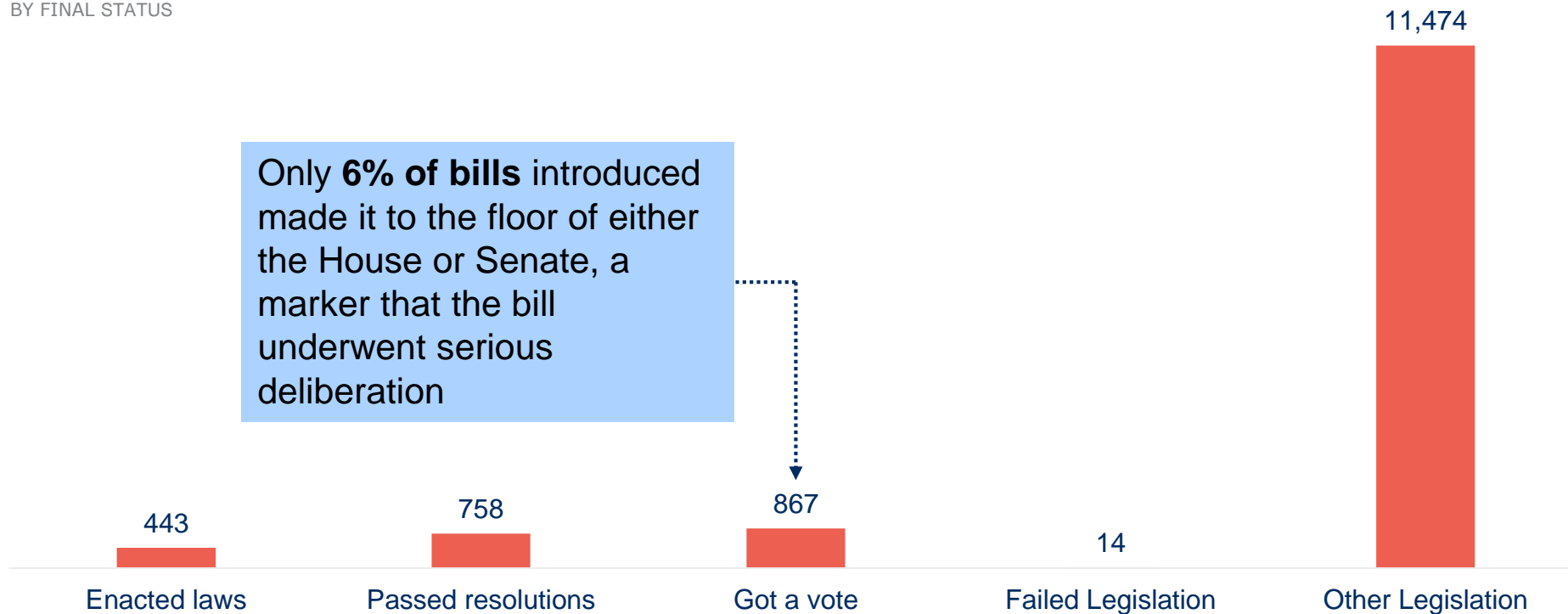
Access. Care. Recovery.



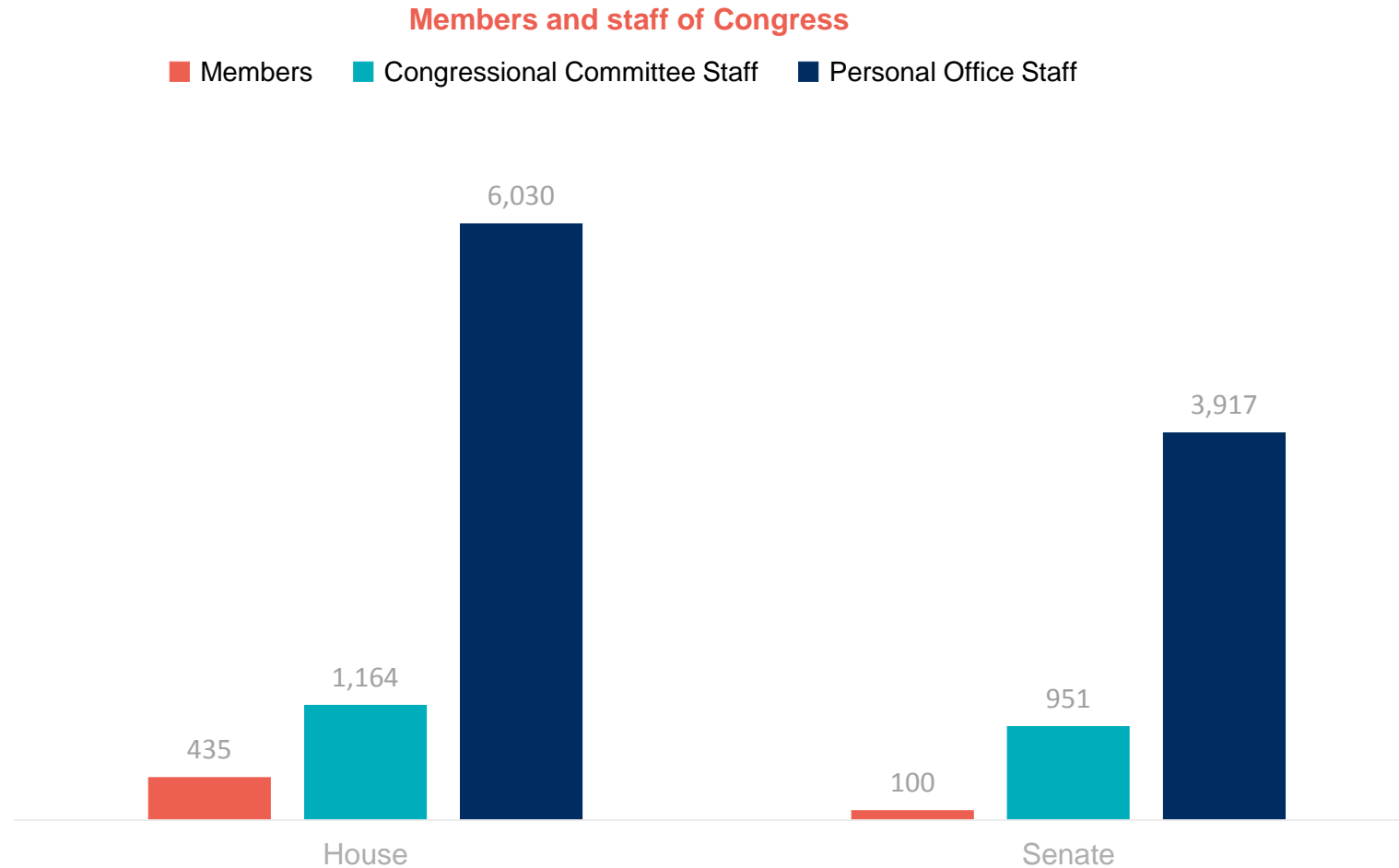
Successful Advocacy Efforts Take Time

Bills and Resolutions in the 115th Congress

BY FINAL STATUS



Hill Staffers Outnumber Members of Congress



Sources: "Vital statistics on congress," Brookings Institute, May 21, 2018.

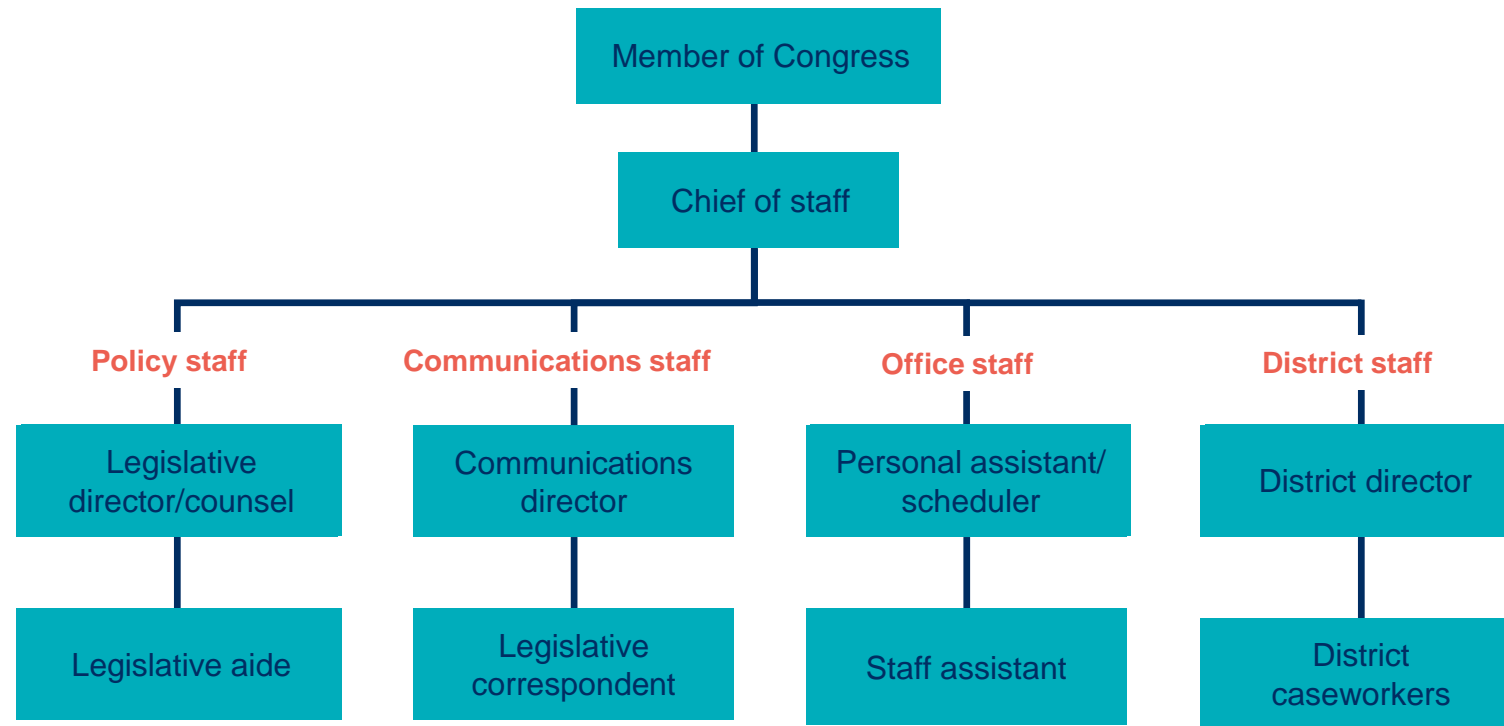
**National Association
for Behavioral Healthcare**

Access. Care. Recovery.



Expect to speak to staffers during meetings on the Hill

Sample organizational structure of a congressional office



Members of Congress have busy schedules – staffers will often have more time to devote to Hill meetings.

**National Association
for Behavioral Healthcare**

Access. Care. Recovery.



Staffers Usually Have More Time to Meet with Constituents than Members of Congress



Member of Congress

Members tend to be highly overscheduled; they average 70-hour weeks in D.C., often achieved by double-booking meetings



Chief of staff

Visitors may not realize how often chiefs are in communication with a Member; the tight bond means that chiefs are often delegated to speak for the Member to constituents



Legislative director

LDs tend to be specialists in the policies of the committees on which the Member serves; they may focus less on other areas



Legislative assistant

LAs tend to be young; their average age is under 29



Legislative correspondent/staff assistant

LCs and SAs tend to be even younger than LAs, often recent college grads

It is not uncommon for members to show up halfway through a meeting or leave part of the way through

Meetings are most often scheduled with and run through one or more of these staffers

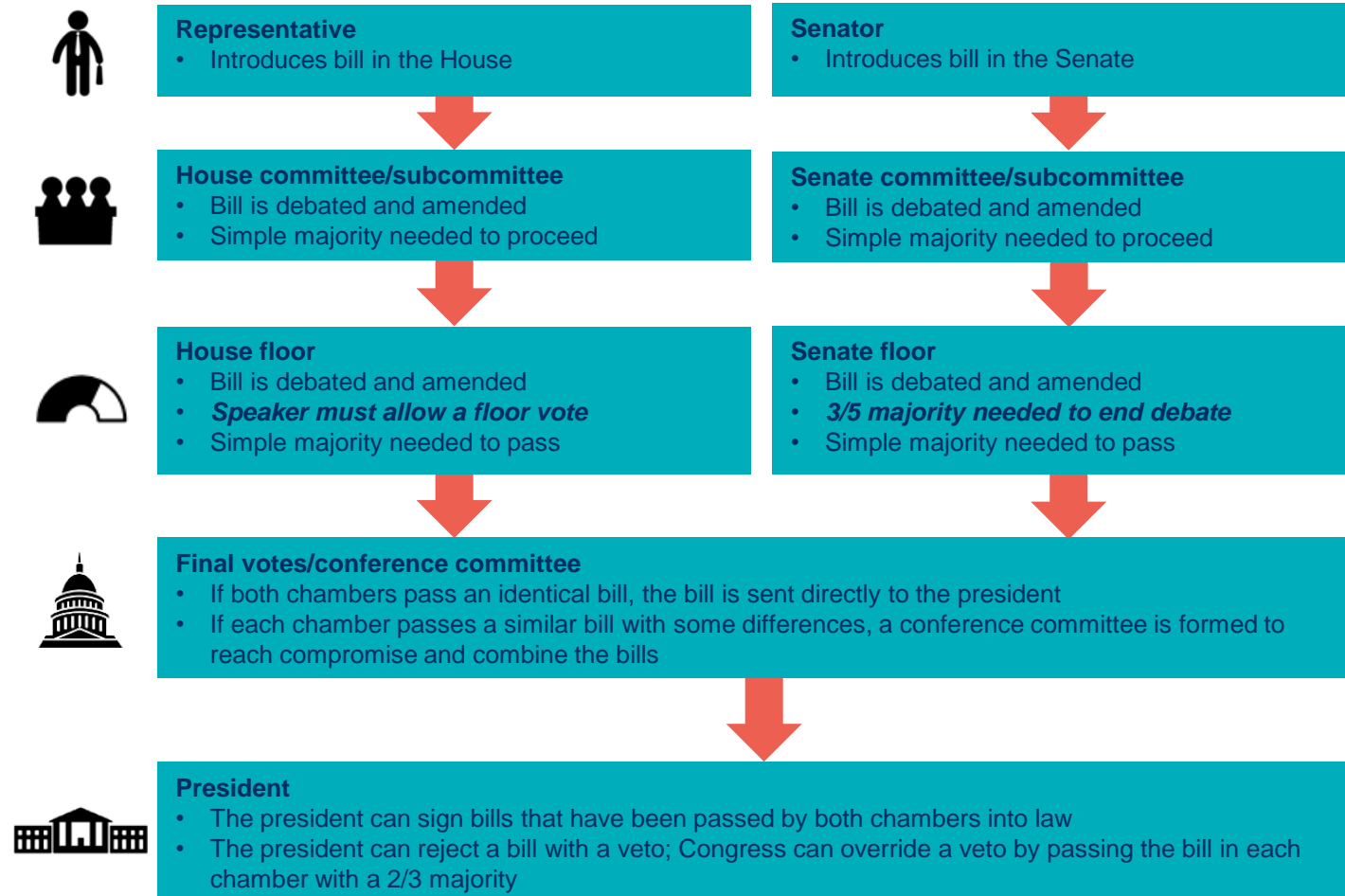
LCs/SAs may join in meetings as a junior staffer or note-taker

**National Association
for Behavioral Healthcare**

Access. Care. Recovery.



Legislative Process: How a Bill Becomes Law



Prepping for a Face-to-Face Meeting with a Member of Congress

Prior to meeting a Member of Congress or their staff, evaluate their priorities and any current activities related to your issue. Consider how you might convey the following elements in telling your story, highlighting your personal connection to their office.

1: Geographic connection



Introduce your geographic connection and convey appreciation for their work.

“We appreciate Congressman Smith’s efforts on behalf of families in Rochester and I’d like to share my story, because it illustrates why this issue is so critical now.”

2: Issue connection



Summarize the Member’s connection to the issue in one sentence.

“We know Congressman Smith is a strong supporter of paid family leave, as evidenced in her recent Twitter chat.”

3: Urgency



Provide a one-sentence overview of why the story is important now (i.e., an upcoming vote or current events).

“With the vote coming up, we wanted to make sure you had stories that demonstrate just how important her position on the issue is.”

4: Additional details



Share your story and call-to-action, offering access to more information as appropriate.

“While I’m here to talk about my experience, there are more at www.strongfamilies.org... We hope our stories and data can assist Congressman Smith in the debate.”

5: Future contact



Reference any upcoming outreach that will be taking place between your counterparts.

“Our senior legislative director plans to connect with [name] to share more details about this campaign.”



Prepping for a Face-to-Face Meeting with a Member of Congress

Advocates can leverage face-to-face meetings with members of Congress and their staff to communicate their positions and build enduring relationships with their representatives. However, meetings are brief and Members are busy; advocates should keep the tips below in mind to get the most of their meetings.

1: Be on time



- Arrive no more than 5 minutes before the meeting
- Inform the scheduler if you are going to be late

2: Be flexible



- Prepare to meet with either the Member or the member's staff; treat both with equal respect.
- If the Member arrives in the middle of your meeting, continue as usual; the Member will ask questions if needed.

3: Stay on topic



- Raise only the issue you scheduled to discuss to keep the meeting focused and persuasive.

4: Keep politics out of it



- Do not discuss elections or campaign support in your meeting.
- Respect the Member's political views and relationships outside of the issue at hand.

5: Leave behind brief information



- Leave behind a 1-2 page briefing with data points on the issue discussed.
- The document should serve as a helpful resource.



Prepping for a Face-to-Face Meeting with a Member of Congress

Advocates can become trusted resources for lawmakers and their staff by following up and keeping in touch with them after face-to-face meetings.



Send a thank you message and valuable information

- Send a brief follow-up e-mail
- Thank the Member and/or staffer for their time
- Include the meeting topic
- Include any promised information to keep the office aware of your issue



Attend events in the district

- Attend town hall meetings or other public events in your district
- Find opportunities to engage in policy matters in the district
- Build relationships with district staff serve as trustworthy resource



Stay in touch

- Don't over-communicate
- Pass along new information as it is released
- Be respectful and informative to gain their respect

