

An HFES Guide to Participation in Federal Policymaking

Abridged Version

This document was adapted from one created by the American Psychological Association's Government Relations Office (GRO) as guidance for members of the psychological science community wishing to weigh in on policy issues. The original text was written by Barbara J. Caulkins and revised in 1995 and 2011 by the GRO (see www.apa.org/about/gr/advocacy/guide.aspx). The current adaptation was crafted by the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society's Government Relations Committee (GRC) and is published with the approval of the APA GRO, for which HFES is most appreciative.

Introduction

In general, this guide is designed to encourage members of the human factors/ergonomics (HF/E) community toward greater participation in the public policy process. Taking part in the political life of our country is a right and a privilege too often exercised by a minority of Americans, the actions of whom have a far more profound effect on the positions and actions taken by our elected officials than is generally realized. It is our hope that you will use this guide to develop and maintain contact with your U.S. Senators and Representative as a citizen and advocate for HF/E. The guide will inform you about how to do this in a way that will not require you to learn all the subtleties of public policymaking or to make public policy advocacy your full-time job.

Through its Government Relations Committee (GRC), staff, and officers, HFES maintains an active role in public policy matters bearing on the field of HF/E, and your direct contact with Congress as a constituent is a vital component of that effort. The GRC attempts to keep members informed on policy developments through postings on the Society Web site and occasional targeted blast e-mail announcements, along with articles in the *HFES Bulletin* under the "Public Policy Matters" banner. Your special training and expertise uniquely qualify you to contribute to the development of policy (often requiring the reshaping of political attitudes) in the wide range of contexts in which HF/E research and applications are relevant.

We hope that you will use the information in this guide to support our shared goals. Citizens are, of course, free to express opinions as they see fit, but we strongly encourage you to coordinate such grassroots activities with the GRC in order to ensure maximum effectiveness. Coordinated advocacy efforts are typically the most effective when—as usually happens—the positions expressed represent a consensus for the field.

In the sections that follow, we provide details of the legislative process to help you put your advocacy work into perspective, give you pointers on the most effective ways to communicate with your legislators, and suggest how to interact with the GRC in your advocacy efforts.

HFES Advocacy

As a relatively small member of the community of scientific and professional organizations that are actively engaged in government affairs, HFES relies heavily on collaborative relationships with larger organizations (such as APA) and consortia (such as FABBS—the Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences, of which HFES is an active member) in its advocacy activities. Despite its size, however, the Society (and the field of HF/E that it represents) is in a position to contribute significantly to these collaborative efforts by virtue of its body of knowledge, its research enterprise, and—most important—its members, whose expertise on important policy issues is frequently relevant. Through the GRC and these relationships, opportunities for HF/E experts or HFES as a whole to weigh in on such issues are identified and appropriate actions taken.

However, occasionally policy developments arise for which participation by larger numbers of HF/E professionals *acting independently* is useful—either alone or in support of HFES’s “corporate” initiatives. Sometimes participation by specific HF/E subgroups is called for (e.g., those in specialty areas, or constituents in key congressional districts or states), and HFES directs targeted appeals to those subgroups. Other times, the entire membership is alerted through the various Society media.

What has been missing heretofore, however, has been informed advice on when, how, and where *individuals* who wish to participate in such grassroots advocacy efforts can do so most effectively. Unless one is intimately familiar with how the “sausage” ground out as policy at the federal level is made, or has considerable experience in advocacy, it is unlikely that he or she is prepared to weigh in effectively.

What follows is an attempt by the GRC to fill that gap, starting with a primer on the legislative process (a refresher for long-forgotten details from your high school civics class), followed by practical “nuts and bolts” guidance on how to register your input for maximum effect. Far too often, well-intended messages to elected officials are wasted because of improper or poorly crafted communication.

It should be noted that the original author and those involved in the revisions write from vast experience in the legislative process—both directly, as members of congressional staffs, and indirectly, as advocacy professionals for professional organizations (notably APA). If ever one might benefit from “inside information,” this is it.

A Short Course in the Legislative Process

Understanding the Legislative Process

(This section was adapted and reprinted, with permission, from Make Your Voice Heard, a publication of AARP/VOTE, The Voter Education Program of the AARP.)

Any legislator can introduce a piece of legislation, which is known as a **bill**. A bill is introduced in a given **chamber** of a legislature—either the House of Representatives or the Senate. A bill is given a number by the clerk of the chamber in which it is introduced, such as “S. 1” for the first bill introduced in the Senate, or “H.R. 92” for the 92nd bill introduced in the House of Representatives during that legislative session.

The bill is then almost always referred to the appropriate **committee** for consideration. The committee system is intended to provide specialized consideration of bills covering a specific topic. By concentrating on one area of government, the members of the committee and their staff become experts on the topics within their jurisdictions. For example, the House Science and Technology Committee has jurisdiction over the National Science Foundation (NSF), and members of the committee and their staffs are informed on NSF-related issues.

Most committees have **subcommittees**, which focus on a subset of areas within the jurisdiction of the full committee. The bill is referred to the appropriate subcommittee, where **hearings** may be held. Interested organizations and individuals can **testify** at these hearings, stating the reasons for their support or opposition, and suggesting ways in which the bill can be improved. Committee staff may then draft modifications to the bill.

After hearings, the subcommittee may **mark up** the bill, a process during which changes, called **amendments**, may be made to the bill. The bill is then **reported** to the full committee, where yet another markup may take place.

The full committee may then vote to **report out** the bill to the full chamber of the legislative body.

In the U.S. House of Representatives, most legislation is referred to the Rules Committee after being reported out from a full committee. The Rules Committee votes to give the bill a **rule**, which sets the time limits for debate and the manner in which amendments to the bill will be accepted. If a bill can be amended by the full legislative body, it is given an **open rule**. If it cannot be amended, it is said to have been given a **closed rule**. These are the basic parameters of the rule process. More detailed rulings exist and are used occasionally.

The legislative chamber’s **leadership**, such as the Speaker of the House in the U.S. House of Representatives or the Senate Majority Leader in the U.S. Senate, has significant power over the scheduling of votes on a bill before the full chamber. The leadership may decide to move action on the bill

quickly, or they may try to keep the legislation from ever being voted upon, depending on the politics surrounding the piece of legislation.

Once the bill reaches the full chamber, it is debated on the floor of the chamber by all interested legislators. If amendments are permitted, Members can propose amendments and request votes on them. Finally, the bill, as amended, is voted on and passes, or fails to pass, out of that chamber of the legislature.

In the U.S. Congress the bill is then sent to the other chamber of the legislature. For example, a bill passed in the House of Representatives is then sent to the Senate for its consideration. Generally, the same process of legislation is repeated in this other chamber. The bill is referred to committee and subcommittee, hearings and markups are held, and it is then reported out to the full chamber for a vote.

By the time the bill is voted on in the second chamber, it has usually been modified by amendments and is somewhat different from the bill passed by the first chamber. Thus the bill must now be referred to a **conference committee**, made up of several members of each chamber, where differences between the two versions are eliminated by compromise and reconciliation. This committee then issues a conference report containing the bill with its agreed-upon compromises, which is sent to both chambers for final approval.

Once both chambers have passed the identical legislation, the bill is then sent to the President to be signed into law. The signature of the chief executive is generally the final step in **enactment** of a new law. If the President does not approve of the bill, the President may **veto** the legislation and send it back to the legislature.

If a bill receives a **veto**, it will not become law unless each chamber of the legislature votes (by a two-thirds margin) to override the veto. If the legislature overrides the veto, then the bill gains passage and becomes law.

Once a bill becomes law, it usually requires funding as well. In the process described above, legislation is authorized. A bill is passed establishing a program or function, setting standards, time limits, reporting requirements, and the maximum dollar amount that may be spent on the program or function.

Next, a different piece of legislation funds the program or function by appropriating monies for the implementation of the law.

Consequently, to both create and fund legislation, two different bills may need to be steered through the legislative process.

Copies of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives documents mentioned in this section, including bills, committee reports, conference reports, and public laws, can be obtained at no charge by accessing the Library of Congress THOMAS Database at thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php.

Some Congressional Committees and Subcommittees That Affect Research and Training Relevant to HF/E

U.S. House of Representatives

In the House of Representatives, authorizations for most Public Health Service (PHS) agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), fall within the jurisdiction of the **House Committee on Energy and Commerce**. More specifically, the committee's **Subcommittee on Health** develops the NIH and SAMHSA reauthorizing legislation, along with many other measures of interest to HF/E. Once authorized, funding for most PHS agencies must be approved by the **House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**. This subcommittee divides its allocation of the overall Federal budget among the nation's health, education, and social welfare programs.

Authorization for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) falls within the jurisdiction of the **House Committee on Science and Technology**. Once authorized, funding for NSF and NASA must be approved by the **House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies**. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is authorized by the **House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**. Funding for VA must be approved by the **House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies**.

The research and training activities of the Department of Defense fall under the jurisdiction of the **House Committee on Armed Services**. Once authorized, funding decisions regarding these activities are made by the **House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Defense**.

U.S. Senate

In the Senate, authorizations for most PHS agencies, including the NIH and SAMHSA, fall within the jurisdiction of the **Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**. Most matters concerning PHS agencies are handled at the full committee level and are not referred to a subcommittee. Once authorized, funding for most PHS agencies must be approved by the **Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**.

The **Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation** has primary jurisdiction for authorization of NSF and NASA. Once authorized, funding for NSF, NASA, and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy must be approved by the **Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies**. The Department of Veterans

Affairs is authorized by the **Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs**. Funding for VA must be approved by the **Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies**.

The research and training activities of the Department of Defense fall under the jurisdiction of the **Senate Committee on Armed Services**. Once authorized, funding decisions regarding these activities are made by the **Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Defense**.

How a Legislator Decides How To Vote

Here is how one lawmaker, former U.S. Representative Lee Hamilton of Indiana, described the process by which he and his colleagues decided how to cast their votes on legislation. This summary was extracted from the *Congressional Record* and reprinted with the permission of AARP/VOTE.

“A question that has intrigued me is how various Members of Congress decide how to vote. Members cast about 400 votes a year on the most difficult and controversial issues on the national agenda. My impression is that in deciding how to vote, Members weigh three goals: ‘They want to make good policy, gain respect inside Congress, and get re-elected.’”

Representative Hamilton then went on to explain the major forces that molded his thinking on a given issue. Notice which he felt was the most important:

- **Constituents**
Constituents are the most important influence on a Member's voting decision. Whether Members are agents of their constituents' wishes or free to exercise their own judgment is a classic question in a representative democracy. But all Members ask themselves on each vote where their constituents stand on the issue. On those issues where the constituency expresses strong preferences, the Member is almost certain to favor them.
- **Colleagues**
Other Members of Congress are important sources of information because, as professional politicians, they will tailor their advice to a Member's needs; they are often well-informed on the issue; and they are available at the time of the vote. Members also pay special attention to the other Members of their State delegation, because they share common interests and problems.
- **Lobbies**
Interest groups are neither the most nor the least important influence on Congress. Lobbyists can help or hinder a Member's work. They can provide members with easily digested information and innovative proposals.
- **The Executive Branch**
The President is, in many respects, the chief legislator. With his excellent sources of information,

his ability to initiate legislation, to appeal to all Americans, and to set the legislative agenda, the President has formidable power in the legislative process.

- **Party Leadership**

Recent electoral changes in Congress have made political party leadership a much more significant factor in Members' decisions. Members of Congress now often hear from their party leaders about specific votes on legislation. There is more effort expended by the leadership of their party in the Congress, i.e., the Speaker and the Majority and Minority leaders.

- **Media**

News media may have their greatest effect on Congress as agenda setters. By focusing attention on a particular issue, they can get the American people and the Congress to deal with it. In considering a vote, Members must anticipate how that vote will be played by the media.

- **Staff**

It is a mistake to underestimate the importance of congressional staff in the legislative process. Because of Members' hectic schedules, they rely on staff to help them evaluate legislation. Today's staffers usually have a good appreciation of political processes, but their main strength is substantive technical knowledge.

Members of Congress vote several times every legislative day on diverse and complex issues. Usually they have more information than they can assimilate, so they need and seek help. It is then that decision making becomes a very personal matter. When the voting clock is running down, the Member must make a decision. The Member knows that in our democracy he or she alone will be held accountable for it.

Regulatory Process

After a bill is passed by Congress and becomes law, it is referred to the appropriate Executive Branch agency for the development of implementing **regulations**. While laws outline the general intent of Congress, regulations spell out the specific details of how the law will be applied. For laws of interest to HF/E, regulations are developed by government agencies including the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Office of Management and Budget, and others.

Effective Communications

Identifying and Locating Your Legislators

The first step in effective communications with Congress is determining the right person to contact. It is generally most effective to contact your own legislator—the woman or man who represents your congressional district. As your elected official, this person represents you and must be sensitive to your

views. Legislators maintain both a Washington, D.C., office and a district office located back home. You can go online to www.house.gov and enter your zip code to determine the name of your U.S. Representative. Your two U.S. Senators will be listed by state on www.senate.gov.

There may be occasions, however, when it will be appropriate and helpful for your purpose to contact other Members of Congress. For example, when the chair of a Congressional Committee wishes to monitor broad public opinion at a critical point in the legislative process, or when you have special expertise in a specific area in which a congressional committee or subcommittee is developing policy, your communication with them can be important. The HFES GRC is in the best position to advise you on such exceptions. Contact GRC Chair William C. Howell (whowell@asu.edu) or HFES Executive Director Lynn Strother (lynn@hfes.org) if you are interested in developing communications beyond your own Representative and Senators.

Once you know whom to contact, you can obtain his or her Washington office telephone number, or be connected with the Washington office directly, by calling the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121. Each Member of Congress also maintains a Web site, to which you can be directed by first going to www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.

Understanding the Role of Congressional Staff

Whether calling, writing, or visiting a congressional office, it is important to understand the role of your Representative's or Senator's staff members. Most congressional offices will have a legislative assistant, or LA, handling your content area of interest. Many congressional staff members are recent college graduates and so may appear relatively inexperienced. However, each Senator and Representative relies heavily on his or her staff to be knowledgeable and informed on the issues. Because the information and advice they provide is often effective in shaping the legislator's opinion on an issue, any time spent discussing your views with them will be a good investment.

In addition to the staff members in the legislator's personal office, the committees and subcommittees of Congress also have professional staff members. These staff members are often more focused in their responsibilities. Whereas a personal staff member usually has multiple subject areas of responsibility—for example, covering science issues, defense, budget, veterans' issues, and environmental issues—a committee staff member is often able to specialize in a small number of areas and to acquire expertise in them. These staff members work for the legislator who chairs the committee or subcommittee or who serves as its Ranking Minority Member.

Staff members in legislators' personal district offices serve still a different function. These staff members take care of the lawmaker's appointments and appearances in the district. They also serve as caseworkers who help to resolve the problems of the district's citizens as those problems relate to federal programs. For example, a district office caseworker can help find out why a social security recipient's

check is late. Usually members of the personal district office staff are not involved in issues of public policymaking or science advocacy.

Writing a Letter as a Constituent

Congressional offices in Washington receive numerous letters from constituents each day, most commonly now in the form of e-mails or faxes, given the need to screen all physical mail sent to Congressional buildings. When sending an e-mail or fax, you should format it as a formal letter for the most impact. The following guidelines will improve the effectiveness of your letter. When addressing correspondence, this is the proper style:

Representatives

The Honorable Jane Smith
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Smith:

Senators

The Honorable John Jones
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Jones:

- **Be direct.** State the subject of your letter clearly, keep it brief, and address only one issue in each letter.
- **Be informative.** State your own views, support them with your expert knowledge, and cite the bill number (House bill: H.R., or Senate bill: S.) of relevant legislation, if appropriate.
- **Be constructive.** Rely on the facts and avoid emotional arguments, threats of political influence, or demands.
- **Be political.** Explain the hometown relevance of this issue. Use your institution's stationery, if authorized (be sure to check with your institution's federal relations and/or public affairs staff first).
- **Be discriminate.** Write only on the issues that are very important to you and avoid the risk of diluting your effectiveness.
- **Be inquiring.** Ask for the legislator's view on the subject and how she or he intends to vote on relevant legislation. Expect a reply, even if it's only a form letter.
- **Be available.** Offer additional information if needed and make sure your legislator knows how to reach you.

- **Be appreciative.** Remember to say “thanks” when it is deserved. Follow the issue after you write and send a letter of thanks if your legislator votes your way.

Timing of Advocacy Activities. Congressional and agency offices are focused mainly on issues (e.g., bills, regulations) with which they will need to deal in the near future. Some, such as appropriations bills, are cyclical, so advocacy efforts are most effective if they are timed in accordance with the office’s deliberation of such bills. Congressional correspondence sent too far in advance is forgotten when the time to get serious about it arrives. Check with the APA GRO or the HFES GRC for specifics on the timing of cyclic congressional budget reviews such as those by the Senate Appropriations Committee. Some issues are not cyclical, arising unexpectedly with very little lead time (e.g., draft guidelines for review and comment). In such cases, HFES generally is informed and does its best to spread the word to the membership—including deadlines and submission instructions—through Web postings and other means.

Making a Telephone Call as a Constituent

The guidelines for making an effective telephone call to a congressional office are similar to those for effective letter writing, with a few additions. Remember, you can reach your legislator’s Washington office by dialing the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121, giving the name of your legislator, and asking to be connected with her or his office.

When preparing to make a telephone call, start at the beginning, just as you would in a letter, remembering that the person you talk to may have just gotten off the telephone with another constituent who had a very different concern. Be prepared with facts and information at your fingertips and a clear idea of what you want your telephone call to achieve.

You can ask to speak to your Senator or Representative, but don’t be disappointed if he or she is not available. Next, ask to speak with the legislative assistant who handles the subject of your interest. Remember, this is often just as effective. If the relevant staff member is not available, you can ask for a return call or leave a concise message, such as, “My name is Dr. Jane Jones and I am a professor of psychology at the University of Hometown. I am calling to ask for the Senator’s support on...” Be prepared to give your address or telephone number.

Meeting With Your Legislator

A carefully planned face-to-face visit with your legislator is the most effective means of conveying your message. Such a meeting can be arranged while you are visiting Washington. You can also arrange a meeting in your legislator’s district office (see usgovinfo.about.com/od/thepoliticalsystem/a/meetreps.htm.)

- **Make an appointment.** Contact your legislator's appointment secretary, state your affiliations and the subject you wish to discuss, and ask for 15 to 30 minutes of your legislator's time. If it is clear that the legislator is unable to meet with you, then a very good substitute is a meeting with the relevant legislative assistant (LA). Legislators have a demanding schedule. In fact, you should not be surprised or disappointed if you meet with the LA, even if your appointment was scheduled to be with the legislator.
- **Do your homework.** Learn as much as you can about the legislator's record as it relates to your issue.
- **Be on time.** But don't be surprised if they are not. Congressional schedules are hectic, and being a visitor to Capitol Hill often requires patience and flexibility.
- **Establish ties.** Introduce yourself, convey information about your affiliations, and exchange pleasantries briefly. But don't get bogged down in small talk. You will have precious few minutes with the legislator, so keep to your purpose for the meeting.
- **Be prepared.** Have your information ready in a digestible, concise form, just as you would when writing a letter or making a telephone call. Know the opposing arguments as well as those in favor of your view. Take your cues on how to proceed from the legislator. If he or she seems familiar with the issue, you can move right ahead. If not, take the opportunity to inform him or her.
- **Be inquiring.** Ask your legislator to state his or her position on your issue. Know what you want in advance, and ask for it. Be tolerant of differing views and keep the dialogue open.
- **Be responsive.** Try to answer questions. When you can't, offer to get back to your legislator with the information. Whether answering questions or not, always take the time to thank him or her for the time spent with you and follow up with a thank-you note, capitalizing on the opportunity to restate your points.

Inviting Your Legislator To Visit

(This section was adapted with permission from Make Your Voice Heard, a publication of AARP/VOTE.)

Would it surprise you to know that your legislator might be interested in visiting your research site? Sometimes the most convincing case is the one seen first-hand. If your research is federally funded, then a visit from your Representative is a natural occurrence. Such visits keep lawmakers in touch with the interests and needs of their constituents, inform them about less familiar subject areas, and provide you with an opportunity to strengthen your relationship with the legislator. Especially attractive to a Representative is the opportunity to meet a great number of concerned and involved constituents during a congressional "District Work Period," when Congress stands in recess. Of course, the initiative to arrange such a visit will have to come from you.

Appearances or site visits by public officials are exciting, but they require a great deal of advance planning. Here are a few tips:

1. Arrange and coordinate the event with the staff scheduler from the Representative's office. Send a written request with all the appropriate details, such as time, place, duration of the visit, number of attendees and other guests, and activities planned. If you are inviting your Member of Congress to an HFES-sponsored event, you should coordinate the invitation very closely with the executive director.
2. You may wish to have members of the local press attend the visit. Contact your institution's public relations office or press office for professional help with this. Be sure that your lawmaker's press secretary is informed before members of the press are invited. It is important to target the right reporters to invite to the event. In this case it could be a political reporter who covers the lawmaker, or it could be a science or health reporter, or all three. Your public relations or press office can invite them by sending a **media advisory** (a one-page announcement with basic information) or by sending a press release, following up with a telephone call two days before the event. You might consider having your institution's photographer on hand and using a photograph in your institution's newsletter or sending a copy to your legislator's office for her or his newsletter. The HFES Communications Department at (310) 394-1811 can help with questions you might have about inviting the press.
3. Notify anyone who will be affected by the visit, such as colleagues in your department and the university leadership, well in advance, and again the day before the event.
4. Provide the legislator's office with precise and detailed directions to the event and designate a contact person who will be available as a liaison in advance of the event.
5. Meet the legislator before the event, allow time for introductions, and provide a briefing on the itinerary and a timed schedule for the event. Discuss important factors surrounding the visit; for example, how many scientists are in the facility, or the amount and source of federal funds received.
6. Introduce your guest. Give a brief explanation of why he or she is visiting and announce whether or not there will be a question-and-answer session.
7. Follow up on any commitments made to the legislator at the event. Coordinate with the legislator's press secretary on the details of a press release, if called for.
8. Don't forget to send a thank-you note, possibly containing photographs taken during the event, as well as any press clippings or news coverage generated by the event.
9. Stay involved.

HFES Contact Information

Because membership of the GRC, like all HFES committees, is not static, the best way to make contact is to check the current HFES *Directory & Yearbook* for the name and contact information for the GRC Chair (as of 2012, William Howell, whowell@asu.edu). Alternatively, one can always reach the GRC via the HFES staff at (310) 394-1811.

Conclusion

Why should you become more politically aware and more politically involved? Because decisions made each and every day by Congress have an impact on HF/E and on the way in which both its scientists and practitioners do their work. And if we truly believe that HF/E has something of value to contribute, then this positive impact extends beyond the field itself to society at large.

Remember that your elected officials routinely make decisions about the conduct, funding, and nature of scientific research and its applications, as well as regulations governing many areas in which HF/E professionals are engaged. The men and women making these decisions are, with precious few exceptions, neither scientists nor individuals with awareness of, or appreciation for, HF/E and what it has to offer society. In making important decisions, these men and women must, therefore, rely upon the expressed views of their constituents, their staffs, the information from experts, and their own opinions (potentially influenced by representatives of well-heeled special interest groups not necessarily concerned primarily with societal benefit).

As an HF/E professional—scientist or practitioner—and as a citizen, you have a right and a responsibility to inform those decisions.