

Memo

To: NAMI State Presidents, State Executive Directors, and Consumer Council
From: Ron Honberg & Andrew Sperling, NAMI National Public Policy
Date: May 14, 2010
Re: Preparation for Congressional Visits at the 2010 NAMI Convention

Dear NAMI State Leaders,

As the 2010 NAMI convention approaches, the NAMI policy staff would like to provide you with important information you will need in order to plan meetings with your state's congressional delegation on Thursday, July 1, – the “Advocacy Day” of this year's convention. Holding the convention in Washington, DC affords both your statewide NAMI affiliates and NAMI national an important opportunity to educate members of Congress about severe mental illnesses and to advance a legislative policy agenda that improves the lives of children and adults with severe mental illnesses and their families. No one is more effective in delivering this message to the U.S. Congress than NAMI advocates who live everyday with serious brain disorders. That is why it is so important for NAMI to make the most of this opportunity during this summer's convention.

Your Role As State NAMI Leaders

The NAMI policy staff stands ready and willing to assist you in scheduling and coordinating your meetings with your state's congressional delegation. However, we do ask that you **identify one person from your state office** to begin contacting your Senators and House members to request appointments for Thursday, July 1 between 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. – the time set aside in the convention schedule for congressional meetings.

These meetings will take place in the offices and members of Congress following the Opening Plenary at the hotel which will feature brief presentations by a few of NAMI's closest allies in Congress (transportation will be provided between the Washington Hilton and Capitol Hill, details provided below).

In order to assist you in helping NAMI members from your state that will be at the convention, Bianca Ruffin of the NAMI staff will be compiling a “master list” of appointments. So once you are able to schedule appointments, please forward specific names and appointment times to her by e-mail (biancar@nami.org) or by phone (888-999-6264, ext. 7699). Or, you can use the attached form and fax it to Marieke at 703-516-0694. **It is very important that you inform Bianca of your appointments.**

Information About Requesting Congressional Appointments

It is expected that on July 1 both the House and Senate will be in session. Most congressional offices are willing to accommodate requests for meetings with constituents. This is especially the case with House members who represent fewer constituents than senators. All congressional offices can be reached through the Capitol switchboard at

202-224-3121. A list of your state's congressional delegation can be reached through the www.house.gov and www.senate.gov

Some congressional offices may specifically ask whether residents of the state/district will be present. Many offices will ask that the request be made in writing with specific reference to the issues to be discussed. I have attached a sample letter that you may find useful in responding to such requests. Finally, some congressional offices will respond by declaring "the Senator will not be available, would you like to meet with a staff member?" In such cases, you are encouraged to take the appointment since congressional staff has significant influence in the legislative process. **Remember to bring a camera for group photographs for your own newsletter or website.**

NAMI affiliates in large states may want to consider prioritizing offices within your congressional delegation to focus on members serving on House and Senate Committees that have jurisdiction over NAMI priority issues (Appropriations, Senate Finance, Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP), House Energy & Commerce, House Ways & Means, Senate and House Judiciary). Please do not hesitate to email me (andrew@nami.org) or call (888-999-6264, ext. 7940) for additional information about which members of your delegation serve on these key committees.

Reserving A Room on the Hill for Your Congressional Meetings

If your state NAMI delegation coming to the convention is particularly large, you may want to consider requesting a meeting room on Capitol Hill for congressional appointments. This will save your group enormous time and energy by not having to move from building to building during the day. These meeting rooms can generally be reserved for up to two hours at no financial cost. A meeting room on Capitol Hill may only be reserved by a member of Congress or their staff. If you decide that a meeting room would facilitate meetings by your NAMI delegation with members of Congress or their staff from your state, contact a congressional office (specifically an office that is friendly toward NAMI issues or one that you have established a good relationship with) and request that they reserve a room in one of the various congressional office buildings. Then proceed with arranging all congressional appointments in the designated room. Although it is not required, attempt to reserve a room that is central to the offices of the members of Congress that you wish to meet. For more information on reserving a meeting room on Capitol Hill, please contact me at the numbers below.

What To Talk About In These Meetings

The NAMI policy staff will be preparing a comprehensive set of "leave behind" materials for you to distribute at your meetings with your congressional delegation. These materials will be made available to you shortly before the NAMI convention to ensure that they are as up-to-date as possible – with additional copies available for you at the convention. They will include summaries of major policy issues, NAMI's position and advocacy points. In addition, these "leave behind" packets will also include basic materials regarding severe mental illness to assist you in educating members of Congress

and staff who may have limited knowledge of NAMI's most fundamental messages (e.g. mental illnesses are brain disorders, treatment works).

You should also feel free to bring specific information about your state NAMI organization's policy agenda to supplement the information we will be providing you regarding federal issues. Finally, placing each of these issues (health insurance reform and parity, research, community services, housing, veterans, employment, and criminalization) in the context of a personal story of a NAMI member is by far the most effective means of helping a member of Congress understand that the decisions they make about federal policy affect the lives of people touched by mental illness.

More on Transportation and Logistics

Buses will begin leaving the Hilton at 9:30 a.m. on July 1 and can be boarded one level above the main ballroom at the T Street entrance to the hotel. Each bus will drop off passengers on both the House and the Senate sides of Capitol Hill.

NAMI is not providing transportation back to the Hilton that afternoon. Taxis are available (without having to call) on both the House and Senate side. House - on the Independence Avenue side of the Longworth and Rayburn Buildings (Longworth - exit at 1st floor, Rayburn - exit at basement level). Senate - exit Hart or Dirksen Buildings at 1st floor level). The cab fare back to the Hilton is between \$10 and \$14, depending on the number of passengers.

Washington's subway system – the Metro – offers service on both sides of Capitol Hill (House - Capitol South Station at the corner of 1st & C Streets, S.E., across the street from the Cannon Office Building; Senate - Union Station at the west side of the side of the station at Massachusetts Avenue and 1st Street, N.E., 3 blocks from the Dirksen & Russell Buildings). The fare is \$1.45 one way. The Hilton is 4 blocks north of the Dupont Circle Station on the Red Line (exit at the Q Street end of the platform and follow Connecticut Avenue away from Dupont Circle).

SAMPLE MEETING REQUEST LETTER

BY FAX

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

Attention - Scheduler

Dear _____:

I am writing to request a meeting with Senator/Representative _____. A group of constituents representing the ___ members of NAMI _____ will be in Washington on Thursday, July 1 to attend the NAMI national convention. Specifically, we would like to request a meeting anytime between 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

NAMI _____ is our state's largest organization representing children and adults with severe mental illnesses and their families. As our state's "voice on mental illness" we would like to meet with Senator/Representative _____ to discuss a range of legislative issues including:

- Implementation of health insurance reform and mental illness insurance parity,
- Funding for scientific research on serious mental illness,
- Access to publicly funded health services in the community,
- Addressing the unmet needs of children with severe mental illnesses,
- Increasing access to housing and employment services for non-elderly adults with severe mental illnesses,
- Improving mental illness treatment and services in the VA, and
- Developing responses to disturbing trend of "criminalization" of mental illness in our state.

Thank you for your attention in this important matter.

Sincerely,