



COLLEGE of AMERICAN PATHOLOGISTS

Guide to Congressional Staff and Roles

Frequently, as a grassroots advocate, you will be in the position of meeting with Congressional staff rather than your elected officials. There are three types of staff you may encounter:

- **Personal Staff** work directly for the member of Congress in his or her personal office. They frequently have a legislative portfolio that includes numerous issues. These are the staff you are most likely to meet with as a constituent.
- **Committee Staff** work for a congressional committee (i.e. House Ways & Means Committee) and typically report to either the Committee Chairman (majority) or Ranking Member (minority). They tend to be policy experts within their committee's area of jurisdiction.
- **Leadership Staff** work for members of Congress in leadership positions, including the Speaker of the House, the House and Senate majority and minority leaders, whips, and conference/caucus chairs.

Washington, DC Staff

These are the commonly used titles and job functions of congressional staff in a Member of Congress' personal office:

- **Chief of Staff:** Usually handles the overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff. The Chief of Staff reports directly to the senator or representative, and usually is responsible for evaluating the political outcomes of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. Meetings at this level typically require some previously established personal relationship.
- **Legislative Director (LD):** Monitors the legislative schedule and makes final recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. In some offices, the LD supervises the other legislative staff and may also handle one or two specific issue areas.
- **Legislative Assistant (LA):** Most legislative offices have several LAs who handle legislative issues within their assigned portfolio of issue areas. When you are scheduling a meeting with a congressional office, the Health LA is the person to ask for if the member of Congress is unavailable.
- **Legislative Correspondent (LC):** Reads, logs, and tallies letters and other written correspondence from constituents and usually drafts the reply on the legislator's behalf. An LC may also take constituent meetings if LA is unavailable.
- **Counsel:** Attorneys who provide strategic guidance and legal expertise. Legislative counsel may also manage a legislative portfolio similar to an LA.
- **Press Secretary/Communications Director:** Garners good press coverage for



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the member and protects the member as much as possible from bad coverage. The press secretary is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to most effectively promote the member's views or positions on specific issues. Many press secretaries double as speechwriters.

- **Executive Assistant/Scheduler:** Responsible for allocating a legislator's time among the many demands that arise from congressional responsibilities, staff requirements, politics, and constituent requests. The scheduler may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, visits to the district, etc. Executive assistants often handle scheduling responsibilities as well as the day-to-day management of a legislator's office.
 - **Staff Assistant/Receptionist:** Usually the first person you speak with on the phone or when you walk in the office. They manage general requests (flags, tours, and mail) and often serve as gatekeepers to higher level staff.
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District Staff

Typically, district staff are not policy experts or well-versed in legislative issues. However, they will frequently take legislative meetings on behalf of the member of Congress when he or she is unable to meet with constituents in the district office. They will either include the legislative staff in Washington via conference call, or pass on the information to the appropriate LA.

- **District Director:** Manages district office(s), staff, and activities, and may also manage the member's schedule when he or she is not in Washington.
- **Caseworker/Field Representative:** Staff member assigned to help with constituent requests. The caseworker's responsibilities may also include helping to resolve problems for constituents in relation to federal agencies, e.g. Social Security and Medicare issues, veteran's benefits, passports, etc.