

ACTION SHEET:

MEET WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS TO ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



Request a meeting with your member of Congress

Every August, members of Congress (MOC) return to their states and districts for summer recess. This is the time of year when they spend a longer stretch of time at “home” and focus on connecting with their constituents. Often, their goal during August recess is to get a feel for what is important to those whom they represent and to build support for their re-election. During August, most congressional offices will have more time and flexibility to consider and take meetings.

Background

This August, in furtherance of our goal to become influential advocates for children, we will be requesting meetings with our Congressional offices. A personal meeting with your MOC or with their staff builds rapport, explores common interests, and lets your elected official know what is important to you. The purpose of your meeting will be to ask your member of Congress to cosponsor S. 1234 / H.R. 2540, the SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act, bipartisan legislation that has the potential to move this Congress. The bill was introduced by Representatives Danny Davis (D-IL) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and others in the House and has **17 cosponsors** so far. In the Senate the bill was introduced by Senators Cortez Masto (D-NV) and Cassidy (R-LA) and others and has **9 cosponsors** so far.

Remember, the most important people to your member of Congress are those who have the ability to vote them into (or out of) office every two (for Representatives) or six years (for Senators). As their constituent, take advantage of this fact and know that conducting regular personal meetings and creating personal relationships with your MOC and their staff is perhaps the most impactful way that you can advocate for children, who otherwise may be overlooked by your elected official's policy and funding decisions.

Keep in mind that much of the time you will be meeting with staff, which is still incredibly important and helpful in developing your relationship with the member of Congress. Oftentimes the staff are the people who do the work on your behalf, so cultivating that relationship is critical.

About the SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act

This legislation will help roughly 1 million children with disabilities, and 8 million people across the country who rely on Supplemental Security Income, or SSI. Signed into law by President Richard Nixon in 1972, SSI provides modest monthly income assistance to children and adults with significant disabilities. An important counterpart to Social Security, SSI is administered by the Social Security Administration, and the maximum monthly SSI benefit for an individual in 2024 is \$967.

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While modest, the income support that SSI provides is nothing short of life-sustaining for the children and adults who receive it. But because SSI's eligibility rules have not been updated in nearly four decades, they now penalize people for saving for emergencies or trying to enter the workforce. One of SSI's most egregiously outdated rules is its antiquated asset limit, which has remained stuck at \$2,000 for individuals and \$3,000 for couples since Congress last adjusted them for inflation in 1984. These ancient limits are even applied to the parents of children who receive SSI.

The bipartisan SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act would increase the asset limit from \$2,000 to \$10,000 for an individual, and from \$3,000 to \$20,000 for a married couple. Increasing the limit empowers adults and the parents of children with disabilities to prepare themselves for a financial emergency. It also allows people with disabilities who are able to work part time to enter the workforce, if they choose, without worrying they'll lose their eligibility for SSI by saving too much.

Join Us in Taking Action!

Our goal this month is to begin or continue to develop a personal relationship with our member of Congress and their staff. We will do this by requesting a face to face or virtual meeting with them to discuss children's issues and specifically to ask that they cosponsor S. 1234/H.R. 2540 if they have not done so already. Please follow the prompts below to secure your meeting and along the way please keep in close contact with First Focus staff for coaching and accompaniment.

1. **Call the Capitol Operator at (202) 225-3121 and ask to be connected to the office of your member of Congress. When connected to the office, ask to speak to or leave a message for the scheduler requesting a meeting. Be sure to specify that you are a constituent and where and how you would like to meet (for example, in the district office or virtually).**
2. **Or in the alternative, search for your Rep's office contact information by name or by state [here](#) or your Senator [here](#). Many offices provide contact information for the office on their website or a request form that can be filled out to ask for a meeting. Most likely your member of Congress will be taking meetings in their state/district offices in August.**
3. **The subject you would like to discuss with the office should be "SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act"—this will help the office figure out which staffer should accompany the member of Congress, or take the meeting directly, if the member is unavailable. If you have questions, reach out to Leila Nimatallah at Leilan@FirstFocus.org for help.**

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4. What if my member is already a cosponsor? That's great! Double check **here** to see if your Senator is already a cosponsor, and check **here** to see if your member of the House is already a cosponsor. If so, thank them for their support of this legislation and reach out to Leila at **LeilaN@firstfocus.org** for an alternative ask.
5. Once you secure your meeting, contact Leila Nimatallah at **LeilaN@FirstFocus.org** for coaching and accompaniment. Leila will work one on one with you to provide you the materials for your particular member of Congress and prepare you for success.
6. Remember, you do not have to be an expert on children's issues. Your member of Congress cares about your opinion simply because of your status as their constituent. Don't let the fact that you do not know a lot about the specifics of children's issues stop you. They do not expect you to be a policy wonk and, in fact, you will be more influential if you are just authentically yourself.
7. Take a look at the Ambassador materials for more background on **how to request and hold a meeting** with your member of Congress and their office and **how to speak powerfully** about kids.
8. And finally, don't forget the follow up! Use social media to post a picture of your meeting and thank your member of Congress for seeing you. Remember members of Congress love positive public feedback. Then check back with the office in a couple of weeks for an answer on your request.