



**THE PASFAA LEGISLATIVE GUIDE**

## NOTE

The PASFAA Legislative Guide was originally created in 2002 by the PASFAA Government Relations Committee. The members of the Committee which created this document were:

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In July 2002, The PASFAA Legislative Guide was awarded a state prize for service to the profession by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA), at its annual conference in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The original version of the Guide was only available in print format; this update is also being provided as a downloadable file from the Government Relations Committee section of the PASFAA web-site. The Government Relations Committee section of the PASFAA web-page includes downloadable lists of The Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation, and the complete membership of the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The lists include hot links to Members' web-pages and other encyclopedic information. Other relevant information is also included.



## **Making Your Message Count: The Legislative Process**

The legislative process is the process by which laws are made. It is therefore important for those of us in the financial aid community to keep up with legislative developments so as to be fully informed about changes to Federal and state financial aid programs. Legislative Committees are the vehicle by which legislatures review bills before full consideration by the legislative body.

The general process is as follows:

- Introduction of a Bill and Referral to a Committee
- Committee Consideration - this takes the form first of public hearings, to solicit comment on the bill, followed by "mark up" sessions, whereby legislators study the bill in detail and can offer amendments to the bill
- Committee Action - the Committee votes on what action to take on the bill

## **WHO to Talk To...**

### **Knowing which Committee to Approach**

It is important to understand the differences between various legislative committees and their respective authorities. The members that are most involved are those on the committee of jurisdiction.

In the Congress, there are basically three Congressional committees that handle legislation affecting your organizations:

**Authorizing Committees:** These Committees have the authority to change provisions in the Higher Education Act, which authorizes Federal student aid programs. In the House, the authorizing committee is the Education and Workforce Committee. In the Senate, the authorizing Committee is the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

**Appropriations Committees:** These Committees have jurisdiction over discretionary spending. The House and Senate each have an Appropriations Committee.

**Budget Committees:** The Budget Committees set the overall discretionary spending limit for the entire federal budget. While they may not make assumptions about how the overall total is achieved. Their assumptions are not binding on the appropriators. This spending limit is set annually in the Budget Resolution. In addition, the budget committees may also include "budget reconciliation instructions" in the Budget Resolution. Budget reconciliation instructions are orders to various committees to cut mandatory spending programs by a certain level. While the budget committees

make certain assumptions about how these cuts will be achieved, the authorizing committees are free to achieve the required savings in any way they choose.

**State Legislative Information:** In the Pennsylvania General Assembly, Appropriations Committees and the Education Committee are the two main committees relating to issues affecting your profession.

**Talk to Members or to Staff?:** For complicated issues, it is probably most important to spend time with the staff member of the Member of Congress or Senate, since staff members are typically assigned to specific policy areas. Staff members are usually more accessible than Members, and they are the persons who will script the Senator or House Member; in addition, the staff members drafts any letters Members sent to other Members, and they advise Members on positions and actions potentially to take on issues.

### **WHAT To Approach Members About. . .**

For many problems you have, you will probably want to approach the US Department of Education or particular professional associations first because getting a legislative change is often very difficult and time-consuming. However, to ensure maximum influence, you should send a copy of any letters you send to the US Department of Education to your Member(s) for their information.

If you cannot get accomplished what you want by working with the Department or your professional association, you may be able to get some assistance from getting your House or Senate Member to write a letter to the Department, or to have them to facilitate a meeting with the Department, or to have them otherwise intervene for you with the Department.

However, many problems truly require a change in legislation and you may have to go the legislative route.

If the problem you are having is one that many others are experiencing, you will most likely want to work with your professional association staff and fellow association members to achieve your goals.

## Terms and Definitions

### Forms of Congressional Action

The work of Congress is initiated by the introduction of a proposal in one of four principal forms: the bill, the joint resolution, the concurrent resolution, and the simple resolution.

**Bills** -- A bill is the form used for most legislation, whether permanent or temporary, general or special, public or private. A bill originating in the House of Representatives is designated by the letters "H.R.", signifying "House of Representatives", followed by a number that it retains throughout all its parliamentary stages. Similarly, a bill originating in the Senate is designated by the Letter "S", followed by the number of the bill. Bills are presented to the President for action when approved in identical form by both Houses.

**Joint Resolutions** -- Joint resolutions may originate either in the House of Representatives or in the Senate. There is little practical difference between a bill and a joint resolution. Both are subject to the same procedure, except for a joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution. On approval of such a resolution by two-thirds of both the House and Senate, it is sent directly to the Administrator of General Services for submission to the individual states for ratification. It is not presented to the President for approval.

**Concurrent Resolutions** -- Matters affecting the operations of both the House of Representatives and Senate are usually initiated by means of concurrent resolutions. On approval by both the House of Representatives and Senate, they are signed by the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate. They are not presented to the President for action.

**Simple Resolutions** -- A matter concerning the operation of either the House of Representatives or Senate alone is initiated by a simple resolution. They are not presented to the President for action.

**Mark-Up**: When a Committee reviews a bill and its specific details; usually done after public hearings have been held.

**Conference Committee**: Joint House-Senate Committee charged with resolving differences in the House and Senate versions of bills relating to the same subject, resulting in a conference report.



## WHEN to Approach Members

**All Along - Generally:** Educate your members and their Staff all along so that they are familiar with you, who you are, who your organization is, what your organization does, and how happy their state is with the job you are doing.

**For Specific Proposals:** You need to identify which legislative vehicle you want to attach to in order to figure out when to approach Congress. You can use a **Reauthorization** bill, an **Appropriations** bill, or a **Budget Reconciliation** bill.

- **For Proposals in an HEA Reauthorization Congress** - Most big reauthorization bills, like HEA, are largely drafted in the first year of the Congress (each Congressional session last two years). Thus, present your issue to the Member early. It is highly unlikely that you will succeed making a major change at the last minute.
- **For HEA Proposals in a non Reauthorization Congress** - There are education programs due to be reauthorized every Congress and since floor time is very difficult to come by the authorizing committees usually put all education amendments on their major reauthorization bill to save time. The same rule applies about getting your amendment included in the original bill early in the Congress when the drafting is being done. However, it is much easier to do HEA amendments later in the process on non-HEA Reauthorization bills (unless your proposal is major or controversial - then you may have to wait until Reauthorization).
- **For HEA Proposal on an Appropriations Bill** - If you cannot wait until an authorizing piece of legislation passes, you may want to attach an amendment to one of the yearly appropriations bills. These typically are **marked up** in Committee in the summer and passed in the fall. However, there is general resistance to authorizing on an appropriations bill and you may want to work closely with the authorizing committees as well as the appropriations committees if you pursue this route.
- **For Budget Reconciliation Bills** - For budget resolution and budget reconciliation bills, start approaching both the budget committees and the authorizing committees as soon as you hear any rumors about a budget reconciliation instruction concerning your interests. Budget resolutions are done annually by May. Sometimes, but not every year, the budget committees also try to cut mandatory spending by issuing "budget reconciliation instructions" in the Budget Resolution. After the Budget Resolution is passed and the instruction is set, focus on the authorizing committee or on your non-authorizing committee Members whom you encourage to contact the authorizers.

## HOW To Approach Legislative Officials. . .

There are various methods of contacting legislative officials, including:

- Telephone
- Visiting them in their legislative offices in Washington, DC or Harrisburg
- Visiting them in their local district office
- Attending a home state function in which they are attending and/or speaking
- Written correspondence by snail mail or fax
- Email correspondence



### Letter Writing Tips

- In addition to a Legislator, write to an aide so they will have to answer your letter
- Try to have your letter arrive on a Wednesday or Thursday so it is more likely to be read that week. Too much mail arrives on a Monday.
- Be concise, no more than two pages. Email is acceptable, but not as effective.
- Be polite in your correspondence. Be specific as well as practical.
- Ask for a response to your letter.
- Send a thank you note when you receive a response.
- Send a copy of your letter to the Chair of the PASFAA Government Relations Committee.



### Personal Contact Tips

- Get To The Point of Your Message
- Know the politics of the issue
- Be factual and honest with your presentation
- Don't fake it. Get back with an answer if you are asked a question of which you do not know the answer.
- Listen carefully to whom you are speaking
- Be persistent in getting a commitment
- Do not be overly argumentative
- NO "off the record" comments - speak what is only on your mind
- Do not degrade to whom you are speaking
- Compromise on an issue is OK
- Keep any promises that you make
- Be polite, thank the person for their time, and send a follow-up thank you letter

**Points to Include In Letters to Members of Congress**  
**Or**  
**the General Assembly**



**Basic Facts About Your School**, such as

- Enrollment characteristics - full-time versus part-time, day versus evening, undergraduate versus graduate
- Most popular student majors

**Financial Aid Facts**, such as

- Number of students or proportion of student receiving Federal student aid
- Total dollars and number of students receiving assistance from specific Federal student aid programs (E.g., Federal Pell Grants, Federal Work-Study, TRIO, FFELP)
- Other Important Aid Programs at Your School (e.g., state grants, institutional funds)

**Reason for Writing**, for example

- To remind the Member of Congress of the need to increase Federal Pell Grant funding
- To remind General Assembly members of the need to increase PA State Grant funding
- To support a specific bill (citing bill number, title, and sponsor)
- To ask a Member of Congress to look into a specific situation (e.g., an inequity in the need analysis formula or a problem with a US Department of Education policy)
- To ask a Member of the General Assembly to look into a specific situation (e.g., state grant funding, NETS, PA National Guard funding)
- To invite the Member of Congress/General Assembly to your school

Be sure to thank the Member of Congress/Member of the General Assembly for their past support of your school and student aid in general

Mention prior communications or prior meetings with the Member Congress/Member of the General Assembly and/or his/her staff

- Provide additional or updated information that supplements your prior contact with the Member and/or staff
- Provide responses to questions or requests that you promised to obtain after a prior meeting

Offer yourself as a resource to the Member's office on student aid issues

## Sample Letter to a Member of the United States Senate

The Honorable Member's Name  
United States Senate  
Office Number Dirksen/Hart/Russell Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Name:

This year is shaping up to be another crucial year for the Federal student assistance programs. We are very appreciative of your support for last year's record increase in the maximum Federal Pell Grant award. It will be very valuable to the 1,000 students at our school who rely on that program and other Federal student aid programs to pay for their postsecondary education. We are certain that we will, once again, be able to depend on your support for similar increases in the 2002 Fiscal Year for the Federal Pell Grant Program.

We are also hoping that you will support S.152, introduced by Senator Grassley, which would remove the 60 month limit on the ability of students to claim the interest they pay on their student loans as a deduction on their federal income tax returns. At Our College, we are becoming increasingly concerned about the amount of loans taken out by our students. While 25% of our students received Federal Pell Grants, nearly 80% utilize the Federal student loan programs. These students need all the help they can get when they leave school. At times, we feel torn between our goals of training students to be elementary and secondary school teachers and the harsh reality that these students will feel as they try to repay their student loans on a teacher's salary. S.152 is a small, but important step towards assisting these students once they leave school.

I would be very pleased to meet with you in your Pittsburgh office to discuss this matter in more detail. If possible, I would hope that you could take the time to visit Our College and discuss the issue first-hand with our President and with our students.

Thank you for your assistance and support. I will be contacting your scheduler to see if we can arrange a face-to-face meeting.

Sincerely,

Cc: Legislative Assistant for Education  
Scheduler

## Sample Letter to a Member of Congress

The Honorable Congressman/Congresswoman Name  
Member of Congress  
Office Number Cannon/Longworth/Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman/Congresswoman Name:

As Congress begins consideration of the Fiscal Year 2002 Federal Budget, I wanted to take this opportunity to inform you of the importance of providing as much funding for the Federal student aid programs as is possible. Your support in the past has been crucial to ensuring that Pennsylvania residents have the chance to attend the postsecondary institution of their choice, without regard to their individual financial circumstances. We are urging you to support a \$500 increase in the maximum Federal Pell Grant award for FY 2002.

Nearly 10,000 undergraduate students will attend My University this academic year along with 2,500 graduate students and approximately 50% will receive funding through the Federal student assistance programs. On our campus, approximately 3,000 students will receive about \$4.5 million in Federal Work-Study funding to provide jobs for 2,000 students, many of whom will be involved in literacy programs serving our community. We are also fortunate that almost half of our students will receive State Grant funding from Pennsylvania, averaging \$1,800 per student.

In a meeting last year with your Legislative Director, John Jones, we discussed our school's view that without more Federal Pell Grant funding we would be concerned whether we will continue to be able to meet the financial needs of our students. We are especially concerned about meeting the needs of our growing population of part-time students. After last year's meeting, we provided your office with statistics showing that MY University's part-time population has been growing at a rate of 10% per year and that the average age of our part-time undergraduates is 40, as compared to 24 for our full-time students.

Please feel free to contact me at (717) 000-0000 or via email at [faa@myuniv.edu](mailto:faa@myuniv.edu) if I can be of any assistance to you and your staff,

Sincerely,  
Name

Cc: Legislative Director

**Sample Letter From Individual to Member of Congress or United States Senator**

The Honorable Member Name  
Member of Congress or Member, United States Senate  
Office Number and Building  
Washington, DC xxxxx

Dear Congressman/Senator Name:

I am the Financial Aid Director at Y College. Y is a small, private, four-year liberal arts college.

I have recently been reading the analysis of the Administration's FY 2002 Budget on Title IV student aid, published by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA).

I am concerned about funding levels proposed by President Bush. Student financial aid is essential to maintain educational opportunities in America. Elimination of programs or reductions in funding could move education out of the grasp of financially and socially disadvantaged citizens. Higher education would become a component of education only available to those in the high-income bracket.

I am currently evaluating the effect of propose changes on small colleges, such as Y College. I will forward additional comments to you as soon as possible.

I appreciate the fact that the Administration sees the need to reduce the federal deficit. It is a government responsibility to control spending. However, education plays a vital role in the future of America.

I ask you to carefully review President Bush's proposed FY 2002 Budget. I ask you to vote against such domestic spending that would reduce funding for and drastically change the Federal student financial assistance programs.

Sincerely,

Your Name  
Financial Aid Director

Cc: NASFAA

## Suggestions for Students Writing Letters to Legislative Officials

By taking a moment to write a letter, you may help yourself and thousands of future students who need Federal student aid and/or state grants to help them finance their education.

It is best to keep your letters short, and write them in your own personal style, using your own words. In composing your letter, consider the following:

**Introduction:** Address the Member by full name and address given. Be sure that your letter includes your name, your home community, and the College or University that you are attending.

**Family Situation:** Let the Legislator know something about your family situation as it relates to your education. One or two sentences are enough. They like to hear about people they represent and they need to know how the student aid programs have affected their constituents.

**Example:** "My father is a carpenter and mother is a keypunch operator with Data X Company and I have two younger brothers still living at home (one will also be in college next year). Even though both my parents are working, there is no way that they could have afforded to send me to XYZ College. I work during the summers and during the school year, but what I earn, plus what my parents are able to give me, still is not nearly enough for the cost of my college education".

**College Choice:** In a few lines, it would be helpful to explain why you choose the College or University you are now attending, and why that choice was important to you in relation to your educational and career goals. You may want to emphasize that you could not have exercised that choice without assistance from Federal and or state financial assistance programs.

**Example:** "Being able to attend XYZ College is important to me any to my family. Although there were other colleges to which I could have gone, XYZ College offered the Engineering program and the campus atmosphere which I considered to be right for me. I believe XYZ College is the best place for me to help achieve my personal and career goals".

**Appreciation:** We suggest that you might close your letter by expressing your appreciation for the financial aid programs that have helped you to date.

**Example:** "I appreciate the opportunity I have been provided. I hope that you will support student financial assistance programs in the future so that future students will have the same opportunity for a college education".

Remember. . .what we offer here are only suggested approaches you might take in drafting your letter. You know better than anyone else what is interesting to you, your family situation, and your college experience(s). We hope that you will not see these as instructions, but only as guidelines, and that you will write personal letters expressing your own thoughts, ideas, and words of appreciation.