

## **Connecting with your Congressman – How to Arrange and Conduct Effective Fit to Serve Meetings (For Providers)**

We encourage you to become an active, vocal advocate for Fit to Serve and H.R. 3471/S. 564 by meeting with your Members of Congress in the district or in Washington, DC. The document below will give you the tools and confidence to schedule and conduct an effective meeting with your Member of Congress.

### **Scheduling a Meeting**

Each U.S. Senator has multiple state offices, and some Congressman also have more than one district office as well. Contact the district office and request a meeting with the Member when he/she is “at home” during one of the upcoming congressional recesses. You may need to follow up your call with a faxed or email official request. If a meeting with the Member simply cannot be arranged, ask if he/she will be doing any town hall or other large events when you could talk to them directly. You may also be directed to meet with a staff member – the key point for these types of meetings is that you politely, but tactfully, ask to meet with one of the top senior state-level staffers, such as the district office director, or the political director. In Washington, DC, the Veterans Legislative Assistant typically handles issues related to Fit to Serve and is a good alternative to meeting with the Member.

### **Conducting a Successful Meeting**

**Introduce yourself and describe what you do:** This sounds like basic common sense, but it is amazing how many people forget to mention the exact nature of their business or its relevance to constituents. Let them know the size of your business, how long you’ve been serving the hearing-impaired, how many patients you serve each year, etc. Why do you need to meet? Describe why you are there, namely to discuss H.R. 3471/S. 564 (H.R. 3471 with House members; S. 564 with Senators), the Veterans’ Access to Hearing Health Act of 2015 and seek their support. Some key background points can be found in the Advocacy section of the Fit to Serve website, [www.fittoserve.us](http://www.fittoserve.us).

**Answer questions and provide supporting materials:** Point out relevant materials or information about the issue and how it impacts your business, and your Veteran patients. *(Don’t pretend or attempt to speak for the entire industry. If you are asked a question that you really don’t feel you can answer, offer to follow-up with an answer. Fit to Serve and IHS staff can help you get the information you need to follow up at a later point.)* Fit to Serve and IHS staff can arm you with meeting materials and talk you through active issues so you feel more comfortable with the facts and our messaging.

**Close the meeting:** Our goal in these meetings is for the Member of Congress to have a better understanding about H.R. 3471/S. 564 and obtain their co-sponsorship of and support for the bill. You can also offer your services as an expert on these issues should they come up for discussion in the future.

**Follow up:** Send a short thank you note to the Member and/or staff. If additional information was requested during the meeting, this is the time to provide it. When following up by email: Identify yourself as a constituent in the subject line, such as “John Smith from ABC Hearing Services following up on our 5/22 meeting about H.R. 3471 (or S. 564).” Congressional offices

are inundated each day with thousands of emails and this is a good tip to ensure that you are remembered. If you choose to send a hard copy letter, we suggest faxing it to the office.

As hearing healthcare professionals, you understand the importance of maintaining an ongoing relationship with clients and are skilled at managing those relationships with relevant news and reminders over time. Think about your relationship with your Congressional office much in the same way. With proper management, your new relationship can be just as valuable, if not more so, in the future. This initial meeting is just the beginning. Make a note in your calendar to check in or send the occasional article or update to keep a key issue before the Member or staff. And be sure to make your communications meaningful so you position yourself as a knowledgeable resource. For written communications or articles, email is best so Members or staff can easily distribute information and keep electronic files. Another way to engage over time is to invite the Member or staff to your office for an upcoming Open House or other event.

Finally, ensure yours and Fit to Serve/IHS' efforts are coordinated. Let us know about your meeting at [info@fittoserve.us](mailto:info@fittoserve.us) so we can provide you materials, and track and supplement the great work you are doing from here in Washington, DC.