

Identifying and Understanding Your Legislators

The most direct way to influence policy in the state or federal legislature is to advocate directly to your elected representatives. Therefore, before your advocacy can begin, the first step is to identify your legislators at the state and federal level and understand how they represent you. By inputting your zip code and address into IDF's "[Find Officials](#)" tool, you can identify all of your relevant state and federal legislators.

After searching your address using this tool, you will encounter a list of individuals sorted into federal and state officials.

The federal officials include the President and Vice President, two federal Senators, and one Representative. These are the officials that report to Washington, D.C. and represent you in Congress. The two Senators listed represent your entire state in the Senate, and are elected for 6 year terms. Each state has 2 Senators who represent it in Congress, regardless of how many individuals live in the state. The one representative listed serves solely your district in the House of Representatives, and is elected for 2 year terms. Each state has a different number of representatives in Congress, since this position is based on the population of a state. Districts are created so each representative serves about the same number of constituents, and your listed representative is who serves your congressional district.

The state officials include individuals that are responsible for solely state-wide affairs such as the Governor, Lt. Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, and State Comptroller. Additionally, this section displays the officials that represent your specific district at the state level, including your state senator and representative(s). These individuals report to your state capital and represent your district in the state government. While legislatures vary from state to state, most have a Senate and House of Representatives/Assembly/House of Delegates, similar to Congress. However, instead of electing two senators and one representative, you send only one senator and the number of representatives elected to serve your district will vary by state. State legislatures and the individuals you elect to them differ from Congress in that they only enact laws that apply to that state, instead of the entire nation.

It is easy to confuse state and federal officials, so just remember: federal officials represent your state/district in Congress with others from the whole country, but state officials represent your district in the presence of only others from your state. There are many healthcare issues that involve both state and federal laws and therefore, you may engage at different levels on similar issues. In addition, while Congress meets year round, with intermittent recesses, many, but not all state legislatures only meet for part of the year. You can find out about the specifics of your state legislature by utilizing the [NCSL State Legislative Websites Directory](#). All state legislatures have websites with a variety of resources including information on bills, elected officials, legislative calendars and legislative districts.