

FAQs on Grassroots Advocacy

When NAHMA launched its new grassroots advocacy initiative, our hope was to establish a program that is both user-friendly and effective. The key to our success will be your involvement. Based on some early feedback, frequently asked questions about grassroots advocacy follow.

Q: I don't know who my elected officials are.

A: Each state is represented by two U.S. Senators. U.S. Representatives (also known as congressmen) represent a specific district within that state. Use NAHMA's grassroots website <http://www.nahma.org/content/grassroots.html> to help determine who is representing you.

Q: How do I get in touch with my Senators and Representative?

A: E-mail and telephone contact are the best ways to reach congressional offices. Most members of Congress have websites which include contact links for constituents (residents of their state or district) to send them e-mail. Once you've identified your elected officials and accessed their websites the rest is easy!

For assistance in scheduling a visit with your elected officials, either in DC or at one of your affordable properties, please contact Lauren Eardensohn, NAHMA's Manager of Government Affairs, at Lauren.Eardensohn@nahma.org.

Q. I don't actually live in Congressman X's district, but our company has a property there. Should I contact them?

A: YES! Even though you may not personally live there, your property may be considered a "constituent company." Therefore, the congressman's positions on affordable housing policy will affect the property—as well as the tenants who are living and voting in the district.

Q: I wrote to both of my senators and my representative, and nobody responded.

A: When you write or call your elected officials, always request a response and include your contact information. If they don't reply, follow-up with a call to the DC office. Ask to speak to the legislative assistant who is responsible for affordable housing issues.

Q: I sent a detailed e-mail to my senator, but they replied with a form letter that doesn't answer my question!

A: Call the DC office and ask to speak with the legislative assistant responsible for housing policy.

Q: My senator/representative does not support my position. Why should I waste my time with them?

A: Occasionally, you will be disappointed by a member's position; but unless an official's views are challenged, there will never be a reason to reconsider.

Q: If NAHMA is my advocate in Washington, why are they asking me to get involved?

A: NAHMA aggressively advocates to protect the interests of management agents and owners who provide affordable rental housing. But grassroots advocacy is a partnership. Among the first questions NAHMA staff are asked in legislative meetings are: “How does this affect my district;” “How many NAHMA members are in my district;” or, “Who can I talk to in my district?” By getting involved, you provide the (voting) human element that moves housing issues from concept to reality for members of Congress.

Q: I have an appointment with my representative and their staff. What do I say?

A: Detailed talking points on important housing issues are available on NAHMA’s grassroots advocacy website. The most important message to share is how a policy will affect the representative’s constituents—including you! NAHMA members may also contact Lauren Eardensohn, NAHMA’s Manager of Government Affairs, at Lauren.Eardensohn@nahma.org to help prepare.

Q: I asked to meet with my Senator, but I only got to see the staff. Wasn’t this a waste of time?

A: NO! Members of Congress rely on their staff to advise them on important issues. They depend on staff to know policy details—the pros, cons, who supports legislation, who opposes it, and most importantly—how a vote will affect their districts.

Q: I did everything I was supposed to do. Why didn’t this good bill become law?

A: The legislative process is designed to be difficult. Thousands of bills are introduced in Congress every session, but only a select few become law. When you are seeking a statutory change, patience and persistence are prerequisite. Often, it takes years to build enough support to move a bill through Congress and then convince the President to sign it.

So, get involved! Make contact with your elected officials. Be persistent. Resist feelings of discouragement. When you think about legislation, think long-term. Finally, when you visit Capitol Hill, NAHMA can help you tailor your message.