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# 2026 Congressional Ambulance Ride-Along Toolkit



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## QUESTIONS?

The AAA Government Affairs Team is here to help! Would you like a member of our staff to set up a virtual legislative meeting or a ride-along? Contact us for assistance!

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[www.ambulance.org](http://www.ambulance.org)

# STEP 1: SCHEDULE THE APPOINTMENT

Members of Congress task their schedulers to receive requests for appointments and to help prioritize their commitments. You will begin by requesting the appointment through the scheduler, but expect to follow up each request with phone calls to the member's office to move the process along—in other words, be tactful, but be aggressive! Members' offices often are overwhelmed with requests and a few phone calls help schedulers and other staff who assist lawmakers make your request a priority. Listed below are reminders for scheduling the appointment:

- **Contact Information.** Look up the contact information for your members of Congress' local office by entering your zip code into the "Find Your Representative" zip code look up. If you need help finding contact info - email [info@ambulance.org](mailto:info@ambulance.org)!
- **Invitation.** E-mail the ride-along invitation to the member's local office (see sample meeting request on page 16) and mail the original.
- **Phone Follow-up.** Follow-up the request with a phone call to the local office. When calling the scheduler, mention that you have invited the local newspaper and/or television station to attend the site visit portion of the event. The promise of media coverage is also a great incentive for members of Congress to accept your invitation.

## SHOULD STAFF ATTEND?

What should you do if the scheduler offers to have one of the member's staff persons go on the ride-along instead? This is a **GREAT OPPORTUNITY!** Do not be disappointed if your member is unable to go on the ride-along. More often than not, the staff person is better situated to advocate your issue for you as he or she counsels the lawmaker on issues and is often the key negotiator who can fight for ambulance issues.

Tip: Offices will often misplace or misfile requests. When you place your follow-up call, offer to send a second e-mail request to the scheduler or staff person. This relieves the staff person from the embarrassment of having misplaced or misfiled your information and establishes the urgency of the request. This follow-up might generate just enough interest to move you up the Congressman's list of potential appointments.

# STEP 2: PLAN THE ITINERARY

Once you've checked the status of the request with the scheduler you may need to provide a more detailed description of what the visit will entail. Offer to send the scheduler an itinerary, such as the following:

## Sample Ride-along Itinerary:

- **1:00-2:00pm:** LUNCH AND MEETING—with [name of representative/host] and [name of a third party supporter like the State EMS Director or other industry expert who is supportive of increasing ambulance Medicare payment rates]

[ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER OF YOUR OPERATION]

- **2:00-2:15pm:** BREAK
- **2:15-2:45pm:** TOUR OF OPERATIONS HEADQUARTERS AND COMMUNICATIONS CENTER—photo op with local newspaper
- **2:45-3:00pm:** MEET with MEDICS, EQUIPMENT & SAFETY OVERVIEW
- **3:00-5:00pm:** RIDE-ALONG

# CREATE THE BEST EXPERIENCE

Here are some tips for creating the best ride-along experience!

- Realize this a working meeting. Although taking a member of Congress on a ride-along may seem like a stressful experience, do not expect it to be. A member or staff person who has agreed to attend will arrive with the expectation that this is a working meeting, will not expect to be entertained and will be respectful of your duties.
- Select a busy time of day and a busy station or post. You will want to conduct a ride-along during the busiest time of day for your ambulance service to ensure the member or the staff person gets the most out of the experience.
- Select and brief field and management personnel. Before the appointed date, choose EMTs, paramedics and dispatchers that are well-spoken and have a service record that exemplifies your ambulance operation's mission. Brief them on the purpose of the visit and explain the basic local background and federal legislative messages that are the objective of the visit.

\*\*If possible, invite past, present or future Stars of Life to participate in the ambulance ride-along. This is a perfect opportunity to showcase your stellar employees.

# STEP 3: IMPLEMENT PATIENT PRIVACY SAFEGUARDS

The ambulance ride-along segment of the congressional visit will be affected by the requirements of the HIPAA Privacy Rule. Therefore, you should take steps to ensure that safeguards are in place to prevent incidental disclosures of individually identifiable health information to reporters or Congressional personnel who are participating on the visit. Even the name of a patient who is being transported is considered protected health information.

**Ride-along Guidelines for Members of Congress and their Staff Members.** To minimize incidental disclosures during the ride-along, consider implementing the following safeguards:

- Once the member of Congress or staff member has accepted your invitation, e-mail each Congressional guest a letter with information about the HIPAA privacy rule (see sample letter on page 18). The letter should explain the purpose of the ride-along program, emphasize the importance of protecting the confidentiality of patient information and request that each guest sign a Confidentiality Acknowledgement (page 19). Copies of signed acknowledgments should be obtained prior to the ride-along and retained for six years after the date of the ride-along.
- Assure that each crew member knows that patient information (including patient names) should not be disclosed directly to a Congressional guest unless the guest states that such information is necessary for health oversight purposes. While Congressional guests may overhear conversations and radio transmissions about patients, crew members should not engage guests directly on patient-related issues.
- Remind crew members to apply the minimum necessary standard when requesting, using and disclosing patient information. Advise crews that this standard does not apply when requesting and disclosing patient information for treatment purposes and the standard should never interfere with the provision of high quality patient care.
- As part of your overview on what to expect during the ride-along as will be discussed in “Step 4— Fine-tune Your Message,” provide your Congressional guests with an overview of the requirement for confidentiality of patient information and remind them not to request from crew members, or subsequently disclose, any patient information (including that which they inadvertently learn) to any party, except as necessary in the performance of the guest’s legally authorized Congressional health oversight function or as otherwise required by law.
- Request that Congressional guests ride up front during patient transport to minimize the overhearing of private conversations.

# STEP 3: CONTINUED

- Assure that your notice of privacy practices permits disclosures for health oversight purposes. If it does not, you will need to amend your notice or not make any disclosures of patient information to Congressional guests who request patient information for this purpose.
- Maintain a record of any disclosures of patient information that a guest requests that you make for health oversight purposes, including the date of the disclosure, the patient information disclosed, the purpose of the disclosure and the guest's name and address. Much of this work can be done prior to the ride-along. For example, you could prepare an accounting form which states the date of the disclosure (which will be the date of the ride-along), the guest's name and address, and that the purpose of the disclosure is "Congressional health oversight" prior to the ride-along. During the ride-along, crew members need only record the information disclosed.

These suggested measures will ensure that you have a successful ride-along program while maintaining the confidentiality of patient information. These guidelines will also help inform ride-along participants of the steps that ambulance companies are taking to implement this important law that Congress enacted in 1996.

**Ride-along Guidelines for Reporters.** Legal counsel has advised that the provisions of the HIPAA Privacy Rule do not permit press ride-alongs unless the patients involved sign written authorizations prior to the time reporters are in a position to observe the delivery of patient care to those individuals. Since there is obviously no way to know in advance which individuals will be transported, it will be extremely difficult to satisfy this authorization requirement. Therefore, the rule precludes press ride-alongs as of April 14, 2003.

# STEP 4: FINE-TUNE YOUR MESSAGE

Your key objective during the ride-along is to educate your member of Congress or staff person about how federal legislation impacts your service. Your member or staff person is also interested in learning about the issues that are important to you.

**Developing Your Message.** The first step is to develop your message regarding how federal legislation and regulations affect local ambulance services. Be prepared to tell your unique story:

- **Profile your service.** Develop a one-page overview of your operation, including the types of services offered, area served, number of employees, years of service, local innovations, and partnerships with local public safety, public health and health care organizations (see local operations profile worksheet on page 20).
- **Emphasize contributions to community.** Explain how your service benefits local constituents. Also provide an overview of the contributions you make to charitable organizations.
- **Research local statistics.** Become familiar with basic statistics about your community, including population, number of uninsured, local economic status, etc.
- **Describe the impact of federal policies.** Carefully articulate the impact of federal policies on your service and the member's constituents. For example, accurately describe how federal reimbursement is below the cost of providing services in your community.

Second, be prepared to explain the national solution:

- **Review national solution and leave-behind materials** provided by the American Ambulance Association for detailed information (visit [www.ambulance.org](http://www.ambulance.org))
- **Relate the national solution to local community.** Explain the benefit of the national solution to your operation and your community.
- **Determine the position of your member of Congress.** Research the position of your member of Congress on your issue or similar issues. Determine the member's voting record, public comments and previous advocacy on similar issues.

The AAA team is happy to hop on a call and answer any questions you might have on the proposed national solutions and where your Member of Congress stands on an issue.

# STEP 4: CONTINUED

**Delivering Your Message.** Assertively direct the conversation during the visit to make your points on the issues. Members of Congress and their staff will want to know what they can do to help you:

- **Start the visit with introductions.** Introduce all of the individuals that the member and staff person will be meeting, including a description about what their duties include.
- **Thank the member or staff person.** It is also important in the opening stages of the visit to offer thanks for his/her attendance at the ride-along and for supporting the ambulance industry—leaving these out of your introduction may create confusion about why the member or staff person is attending the ride-along in the first place.

## **Provide an overview of what to expect during the ride-along:**

- Sign appropriate release forms
- Overview of itinerary
- Overview of field and management personnel duties
- Instructions on safety procedures (i.e., seatbelt use), the best place to sit in the vehicle and what to do on a call, on the scene and during patient transport
- Overview of the requirement for confidentiality of patient information including a reminder to not request from crew members, or subsequently disclose, any patient information (including that which they inadvertently learn) to any party, except as necessary in the performance of the guest's legally authorized Congressional health oversight function or as otherwise required by law

## **Provide a tour and overview of your operations:**

- Explanation of equipment, technologies and innovations employed to assure quality and efficient patient care

## **Tell the member or staff person of your role in the community's emergency response system:**

- Ambulance service providers respond to individual medical emergencies and routine ambulance transportation needs in the communities they serve.
- Ambulance service providers are a critical component of each community's disaster response system.
- If there was a terrorist attack, natural disaster or other public health emergency, all ambulance service providers, both emergency and non-emergency, would be available to respond to the call for help.

# STEP 4: CONTINUED

**Ask the member or staff person to support federal legislation that assists ambulance providers:**

- **AAA Website:** Reference the AAA's website and let the lawmaker and their staff person know that they can find the latest materials on our 2026 legislative priorities at <https://ambulance.org/advocacy/>.
- **Tip:** Provide detailed information to the lawmaker or staff person to build support for your issues. Also explain operational details, such as your vehicle, its equipment, the patients for which you provide services and your duties as an emergency medical services professional. These explanations will prompt questions from the member or staff person. If a question arises that you do not know the answer to, jot the question down and then tell the lawmaker or staffer that you will get back to them with the answer. Then, forward the question onto the appropriate person (such as local ambulance managers, other local officials, state EMS office or the AAA office in Washington DC) and assure that a timely follow-up is provided.

# STEP 5: GENERATE MEDIA COVERAGE

Newspaper and television reporters love to cover stories about members of Congress riding in ambulances. In the process of organizing your ride-along, you may even be asked by the member's press secretary whether the media are allowed to attend. If you are not asked this question, then you should ask the question yourself: "Have you made arrangements with the [NAME OF LOCAL NEWSPAPER OR TV STATION] to interview the Congressman while he/she is here?"

- When the media attends a portion of the ride-along, free publicity is generated for your operation and the member of Congress. In addition, greater visibility for ambulance issues is created. News stories about the local impact of federal legislation affecting ambulance services elevate the status and urgency of the issues, making them more "real" to the lawmakers.

## Three Easy Steps for Contacting News Reporters

### 1) **Create a Media List and Press Release**

- **Media List.** Compile a list of local media outlets in your area. Your list of media sources should include local newspaper, television and radio.
- **Press Release.** Each press release tells a story and tells the media when the event will happen. Each press release should answer the following five questions: who, what, why, where and when (see Sample Press Release on page 19).

### 2) **E-mail the Press Release**

- **Explain Why the Ride-along is Important.** Your ride-along press release should tell reporters not only the basic facts of the event (i.e., who, what, where and when), but also why they need to attend your event (i.e., local ambulance provider seeking to assure community funding needs are met).
- **Five Days Before Event.** E-mail the press release at least five days before the event.
- **One Day Before the Event.** E-mail the press release again on the day before the event.

Need help drafting a press release or getting in contact with your local media? Contact [info@ambulance.org](mailto:info@ambulance.org) and the AAA staff will help you with this step!

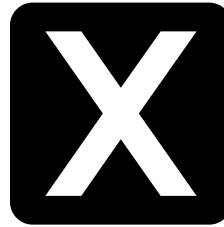
# STEP 5: CONTINUED

## 3) Call the Reporter

- **Before calling.** Review the press release and fact sheet and determine what three points about your story might interest the reporter—jot them down.
- **On the call.** State clearly who you are and why you are calling:
  - “I’m calling to let you know how my [organization] is going to help the community prepare for terrorism attacks.”
  - “Did you receive the press release and fact sheet about the ambulance ride-along with Congressman Smith?”
    - NO**—Explain that you will resend the information and ask their permission to follow-up at a later time to answer questions about the materials.
    - YES**—Ask if they will attend the event.
- **Before Hanging Up.** Thank the reporter for their time.

**Tip:** If you get the voice mail of a reporter, it is best to not leave a message with the hope that they will call you back (they most likely won’t call you back). Instead, FOLLOW-UP WITH ANOTHER CALL. If you decide to leave a message, sell your story as succinctly as possible, speak slowly and clearly when leaving your name and phone number.

# HIGHLIGHT THE VISIT ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Today, one of the most effective ways to get a story out there is through social media. For starters, social media is free and widely used. Social media will allow you to get pictures and videos from the visit out to the public in real time.

Almost all representatives are on at least Facebook and X. Many are also now on Instagram. Throughout the visit, be sure to take a lot of photos and short videos if possible to share on social media. When posting on Facebook and Instagram or tweeting on Twitter, be sure to tag the representative's office and the AAA. This will make the office aware of the post and often times the representative's office will share your post or retweet you, amplifying the impact of your social media posts. Though not an election year, also check to see if the representative has separate social media for their campaign (i.e. Johnson for Congress). If so, be sure to tag campaign accounts in your posts as well. You can also post on social media prior to the representatives media, letting them know how much you are looking forward to it.

When sharing photos or videos, do your best to ensure that they are high quality. The better the photo, the better your service and the representative will look (which they appreciate).

Lastly, the AAA wants to see photos of Congressional ride-alongs. Please tag the AAA in your posts as well. Facebook: [americanambulanceassoc](#) Twitter: [@amerambassoc](#) Instagram: [@amerambassociation](#). The AAA would love to share and retweet your posts, increasing your reach further.

Need help with social media? Contact [info@ambulance.org](mailto:info@ambulance.org) and the AAA staff will help you with this step!

# SOCIAL MEDIA CONTINUED:

Here are some photos from recent Congressional Meetings as an example:



# STEP 6: ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

At the end of the ride-along, there are a few key things you should say and do to ensure a successful meeting and to urge support of your issues:

**Provide Leave-Behind Materials.** Provide the lawmaker or staff person with the leave-behind materials provided by the AAA as part of this tool kit. The most recent material can be found on the AAA website.

- **Urge Support of Ambulance Issues.** Ask the member of Congress or staff person to cosponsor our Medicare Extender Bill.
- **Write a Thank You Note.** Thank the member and staff for his or her time, provide a reminder of your issues and urge their support.
- **Assure Timely Follow-up.** It is absolutely critical to follow-up on any requests for additional information and other commitments that may have been made during the visit.

**Tip:** Send the member of Congress' office pictures of their visit. They will appreciate your thoughtfulness and the note you enclose gives you another opportunity to reinforce your key messages.

# SAMPLE MEETING REQUEST

[PLACE ON COMPANY LETTERHEAD]

[DATE]

Dear [INSERT NAME OF SCHEDULER]:

I respectfully request to meet with [CONGRESSMAN X; SENATOR X] during the month of [X]. As you know, policies that Congress establishes regarding Medicare and the workforce have a significant impact on the EMS industry and the citizens of [ State / County / Town ]

Our company provides ambulance services to [X NUMBER OF CITIZENS, PATIENTS OR SENIORS] in [Name Of Town Or District]. We are a critical part of the health care system and in some areas are the only available health care 24 hours a day 365 days a year.

As a provider of essential healthcare and first responder services, we would like to discuss Medicare ambulance relief with [Congressman or Senator] [INSERT LAST NAME OF MEMBER]. We would be happy to host the meeting at our facility at [INSERT LOCATION] so that we can also provide a tour to demonstrate the latest patient care treatments and state-of-the-art equipment. The [Congressman or Senator] will also see first-hand the range of duties we perform throughout a shift, such as [GIVE EXAMPLES OF DUTIES PERFORMED DURING A SHIFT].

We are happy to accommodate the [Congressman's or Senator's] schedule. Feel free to contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or [your email address] with the dates that the [Congressman or Senator] might be available.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[PROVIDER NAME]

# SAMPLE RIDE-ALONG INVITATION

[PLACE ON COMPANY LETTERHEAD]

[DATE]

Dear [INSERT NAME OF SCHEDULER]:

My company and I would like to invite [CONGRESSMAN X; SENATOR X] for a tour of our operations headquarters and an ambulance ride-along during the month of August. As you know, policies that Congress establishes regarding Medicare and homeland security issues affect every citizen in [INSERT NAME OF TOWN].

As a provider of essential healthcare and first responder services, we hope the ambulance ride-along will serve as a source of valuable information to [Congressman or Senator] [INSERT LAST NAME OF MEMBER] to assist in [HIS/HER] efforts to ensure that our community has the resources needed to provide a timely and quality response to each request for ambulance services. During the ride-along, we will demonstrate the latest patient care treatments and state-of-the-art equipment. The [Congressman or Senator] will also see first-hand the range of duties we perform throughout a shift, such as [GIVE EXAMPLES OF DUTIES PERFORMED DURING A SHIFT].

We are happy to accommodate the [Congressman's or Senator's] schedule. Feel free to contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or [your email address] with the dates that the [Congressman or Senator] might be available.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[PROVIDER NAME]

# SAMPLE HIPAA PRIVACY RULE LETTER

[PLACE ON COMPANY LETTERHEAD]

[DATE]

Dear [INSERT NAME OF MEMBER OF CONGRESS]:

We are pleased that you have [YOUR STAFF HAS] accepted our invitation to ride along with one of our crews as they provide vital medical services to your constituents. We believe this experience will assist you in performing your Congressional oversight role over the emergency medical services system that serves beneficiaries of federal health care programs and other citizens in the [COMMUNITY/COMMUNITIES] you represent and nationwide.

As you know, HIPAA privacy regulations require health care providers to be more vigilant than ever in protecting the confidentiality of patient information. While HIPAA does permit disclosures of information to federal agencies and authorities for purposes of performing their oversight functions with respect to the health care system and federal programs, HIPAA obligates us to limit the amount of patient information disclosed to the minimum amount necessary for any particular purpose. Consequently, our crews have been trained to treat all patient information, including, but not limited to, patient names and information about patient conditions and treatment, with the utmost discretion. We request that [YOU/YOUR STAFF] not seek information about our patients beyond what [YOU/THEY] incidentally observe in the course of the ride along.

Finally, prior to the ride along, we respectfully ask that [YOU/YOUR STAFF] sign and return the attached Confidentiality Acknowledgment at the [EMAIL OR ADDRESS] listed above to help us discharge our ethical obligations to our patients to respect and protect their privacy and our legal obligations under HIPAA by documenting our efforts to safeguard patient information. This form is similar to the confidentiality statement we require our own employees to sign.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[PROVIDER NAME]

# SAMPLE CONFIDENTIALITY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

[PLACE ON COMPANY LETTERHEAD]

The undersigned is a representative of a federal agency or authority which is authorized by law to oversee the health care system and federal programs. In the course of performing that function while participating in a ride-along with [COMPANY NAME] Ambulance Company (“[COMPANY NAME]”), the undersigned will unavoidably come into contact with protected health information regarding patients of [COMPANY NAME]. “Protected health information” includes patient names and other demographic information and all information about a patient’s condition, treatment, or payment for medical services.

The undersigned acknowledges that this information is private and confidential, and agrees not to request from [COMPANY NAME] crews, or subsequently disclose any protected health information, including that which I may incidentally observe or hear, to any party, except as necessary in the performance of my legally authorized Congressional health oversight functions or as otherwise required by law.

**Signature of Ride-along Participant**

---

**Date**

---

# SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

[PLACE ON COMPANY LETTERHEAD]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
[INSERT DATE]

CONTACT: [INSERT CONTACT PERSON]  
[INSERT PHONE NUMBER]

[INSERT CONGRESSMAN or SENATOR and LAST NAME] TO PARTICIPATE IN AMBULANCE RIDE-ALONG WITH [INSERT AMBULANCE SERVICE NAME HERE] TO SEE MEDICS IN ACTION

[Local town, State, Date] -- On [insert date here], [insert Congressman or Senator and last name] will participate on an ambulance ride-along with [insert Ambulance Service name here] to see local medics in action.

As a member of the American Ambulance Association (AAA), which represents ambulance service providers across the United States, [insert Ambulance Service name] invited [insert Congressmen or Senator and last name here] to experience, first hand, the efforts of [insert town's name here] local heroes.

Our goal is to provide [insert Congressmen or Senator and last name here] with first-hand knowledge about the local impact of efforts in Congress to increase Medicare and homeland security funding for ambulance services. "It is essential that the safety net provided by America's ambulance service providers is strong and has the capacity to respond to not only public health and safety threats, such as the tragic events such as mass casualty incidents or natural disasters, but also to individual medical emergencies and the routine ambulance transportation needs of the communities we serve," said [ambulance service spokesperson's name here]. "That is the main reason we have invited [insert Congressmen or Senator and last name here] to visit with us."

During the ambulance ride-along, [insert Congressmen or Senator and last name here] will see the latest patient care treatments and state-of-the-art equipment. [Insert Congressmen or Senator and last name here] will also see the range of duties performed by [name of company] medics [include examples of duties performed during shift] and will learn about the emergency preparedness and response needs of the community.

###

# LOCAL OPERATIONS PROFILE WORKSHEET

[PLACE ON COMPANY LETTERHEAD]

As you prepare for the ride-along visit with your member of Congress, complete the following checklist to assure you are prepared to answer questions about your operations, your community and your issues.

## **Profile your service:**

- Types of services offered and years of service
- Area served
- Number of ambulances and employees
- Number of ambulance calls and transports per month, per year
- Service benchmarks such as response time performance, quality assurance, public education
- Local innovations or awards
- Partnerships with local public safety, public health and health care organizations
- Disaster and terrorism preparedness activities

## **Contributions to community:**

- Examples of how ambulance services serve local constituents and Medicare beneficiaries
- Examples of ambulance service contributions to local charitable organizations

## **Local statistics:**

- Population of area served
- XX% of population uninsured
- Describe economic status of local city, county and state government

## **Impact of federal policies:**

- Medicare is xx% of your total revenue; Medicaid is xx% of your total revenue
- Medicare rates are xx% below your cost of service; Medicaid rates are xx% below cost of service
- Describe lost revenue as a result of below-cost Medicare rates
- Explain why local and state taxpayers cannot subsidize below-cost Medicare rates
- Charity care is xx% of your total revenue because uninsured patients can't pay
- Without a Medicare increase, describe how you will have to cut services (longer response times, fewer ambulances, cuts in salary or benefits for employees, less investment in quality equipment and vehicles)
- Describe the types of equipment, training, exercises and planning for which homeland security funding is needed



**THANK YOU FOR  
YOUR SUPPORT!**