



**Advocacy, COVID, and OT:
What's Happening Federally?**
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AOTA Federal Affairs Department



Heather Parsons
VP of Federal Affairs
Twitter: @HParsonsAOTA

Andrew Bopp
Senior Legislative Representative
Twitter: @AndyBAOTA

Abe Saffer
Legislative Representative
Twitter: @AbeAOTA

Jill Tighe
PAC/Grassroots Associate
Twitter: @JTigheAOTA

Learning Objectives

- To understand basic information regarding **legislative process** affecting federal policy
- To identify **current legislation** and how recent changes affect the future of occupational therapy, particularly related to COVID-19
- To identify **opportunities in leadership, advocacy and legislation** as a student, new graduate, or seasoned practitioner

Understanding the Legislative Process

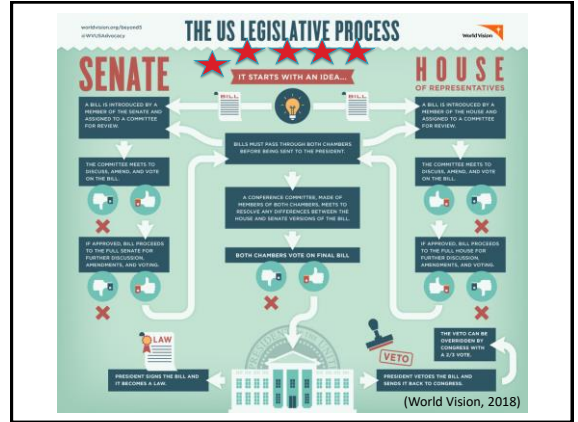
Congress

SENATE

- 100 members – 2 from each state
- 6 year terms
- 1/3 of Senate up for re-election every 2 years

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

- 435 members
- 1 Congressperson per district
- Distribute evenly by population (adjusted each Census)
- Entire House up for re-election every 2 years



THE US LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

IT STARTS WITH AN IDEA...

SENATE
A BILL IS INTRODUCED BY A MEMBER OF THE SENATE AND ASSIGNED TO A COMMITTEE FOR REVIEW.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
A BILL IS INTRODUCED BY A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE AND ASSIGNED TO A COMMITTEE FOR REVIEW.

BILLS MUST PASS THROUGH BOTH CHAMBERS BEFORE BEING SENT TO THE PRESIDENT.

THE COMMITTEE MEETS TO REVIEW, AMEND, AND VOTE ON THE BILL.

A CONFERENCE COMMITTEE, MADE UP OF MEMBERS OF BOTH CHAMBERS, MEETS TO RESOLVE ANY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE HOUSE AND SENATE VERSIONS OF THE BILL.

BOTH CHAMBERS VOTE ON FINAL BILL.

IF APPROVED, BILL PROCEEDS TO THE FULL SENATE FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION, AMENDMENT, AND VOTING.

IF APPROVED, BILL PROCEEDS TO THE FULL HOUSE FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION, AMENDMENT, AND VOTING.

THE VETO CAN BE OVERIDDEN BY CONGRESS WITH A 2/3 VOTE.

PRESIDENT SIGNED THE BILL AND IT BECAME A LAW.

PRESIDENT VETOS THE BILL AND SENDS IT BACK TO CONGRESS.

(World Vision, 2018)

All bills must be re-introduced at the beginning of each Congress!

Each Congress is 2 years long, beginning January 3rd of odd numbered years

Current Legislation

116th Congress (2019-2021)

Legislative Priorities by AOTA, prior to COVID-19

- Affordable Care Act – avoiding repeal
- Medicaid expansion
- Issues following Medicare Cap Repeal
 - Home Health reimbursement (to be implemented in 2020)
 - OTA reimbursement (to be implemented in 2022)
- Value-based payment model for Medicare (October 2019)

116th Congress (2019-2021)

Before COVID-19 (January 2019-March 2020):

Three topics were making progress-

- 1) HOME HEALTH
- 2) DIVERSITY IN WORKFORCE
- 3) MENTAL HEALTH AND LOAN FORGIVENESS

During COVID-19 (March 2020 to present):

Three topics **ARE STILL** making progress, just at different speeds:

- 1) HOME HEALTH
- 2) DIVERSITY IN WORKFORCE
- 3) MENTAL HEALTH AND LOAN FORGIVENESS

ADDED: 4) TELEHEALTH

ADDED: 5) PREVENTING MEDICARE CUTS

ADDED: 6) INCLUDING FUNDING FOR EI AND K-12

During COVID-19 (March 2020 to present):

We are in a declared Public Health Emergency.
Temporary provisions include:

- 1) HOME HEALTH
OTs can open home health cases.
- 2) TELEHEALTH
OT practitioners are reimbursed for telehealth services for Medicare.
- 3) PREVENTING MEDICARE CUTS
There is a proposal to cut reimbursement to OT by 9%.
- 4) INCLUDING FUNDING FOR EI AND K-12
Early intervention services funding was not included in COVID relief – just K-12.

Where OT
Stands Now

Home Health

Waivers to expand the waiver to allow occupational therapists to open home health cases has been **extended through Jan 20, 2021**.

We will present another bill in 2021 related to this permanently (we won't have new bill number until it's introduced)

Where OT
Stands Now

Telehealth

Waivers to expand the waiver to allow occupational therapy practitioners to be reimbursed for telehealth (for Medicare) has been **extended through Jan 20, 2021**.

A bill to **permanently add OT to Medicare telehealth** has had its introduction on 11/5/20 to make certain permanent flexibilities permanent (**H.R.8727**).

Where OT
Stands Now

Medicare Cuts

A bi-partisan bill was introduced 10/30/20 in the House, that would put a TWO YEAR pause on proposed cuts to Medicare Part B (H.R.8702)

This bill is a serious proposal – the lead sponsors Bera (D-CA) and Bucshon (R-IN) recently lead a letter to house leadership opposing these cuts that had 220 (out of 435) Members of the House as signatories.

Where OT
Stands Now

Early Intervention and K-12 Funding

We continue to advocate for early intervention funding related to future relief packages related to the pandemic.

We anticipate there will be numerous needs for children developmentally given the increased use of telehealth and/or lack of access and/or social disruption – anticipate action related to this.

Getting Involved and Staying Informed

Advocacy for students and practitioners

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Virtual AOTA Hill Day 2020

- **Monday, September 14th**—Live Webinar with AOTA Staff about current events on the Hill, and Advocacy 101. This will include time for Q&A; First Grassroots Activity Assignment—Specific Issue TBD
- **Tuesday September 15th**—Second Grassroots Activity Assignment & Learning Activities; AOTA Staff "office hours" to answer questions.
- **Wednesday, September 16th**—Third Grassroots Activity Assignment & Learning Activities; AOTA Staff "office hours" to answer questions.
- **Thursday, September 17th**—Live Conversation with Members of Congress or their staff led by AOTA Staff & Volunteer Leadership
- **Friday, September 18th**—Live Webinar debrief (including Q&A participation) & Reflection Activity

News and outcomes from this event:

<https://cqrceengage.com/aota/Virtual-Hill-Week> (Link in chat)

American Occupational Therapy Political Action Committee



What is a Political Action Committee?

A PAC is a committee that provides funding to state and federal candidates who support a profession or industry and their initiatives through private donations from association members.

Become an AOTPAC Ambassador

Duties and Responsibilities:

1. Assist in and/or conduct fundraising at state level with direction from the AOTPAC Region Board Director.
2. Attend AOTPAC Board Conference calls scheduled for February, May, August, and November.

Choose a minimum of 2 activities per year (include at least one from #s 1-5):

1. Work directly with the AOTPAC Region Board Director to establish a relationship with the state occupational therapy association leadership.
2. Assist in efforts at the state level to gain and/or increase AOTA members' financial support of AOTPAC.
3. Co-present with AOTPAC Board Director at events such as virtual or face-to-face state conference, teleconference, or to occupational therapy educational programs.
4. Participate in at least one state occupational therapy conference or event to provide visibility, fundraising, and information about AOTPAC under the direction of the AOTPAC Region Board Director. This may be done in person, through conference call, or through video conferencing technology.
5. At AOTA Annual Conference, attend the face-to-face Ambassador meeting and volunteer to work at the AOTPAC booth for at least 2-4 hours during conference.
6. Attend federal candidate event(s) on behalf of AOTPAC, when and if available.
7. Share information with the U.S. Representative(s) and Senator(s) within own state regarding AOTA legislative issues that impact the profession of occupational therapy.
8. Promote grassroots advocacy on federal issues to OTs, OTAs, and students in own state.
9. At AOTA's Annual Hill Day, in addition to attending your own congressional meetings, participate in the Mentor/Mentee program as a Mentor.

Become an AOTPAC Ambassador

- **Interested?**
 - Email Sarah McKinnon for more info (smckinnon3@mghiph.edu)
- **Ready to Apply?**
 - Must be an AOTPAC contributor
 - Submit a letter of intent
 - Contact and submit for Board review to ddennis@aota.org
- **Continued mentorship and support**

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AOTPAC regions

- Region I
- Region II
- Region III
- Region IV
- Region V

AOTPAC: Being involved and contributing

SUPPORT LEGISLATORS

- We want to **elect and retain legislators** that understand OT and are supportive to our causes
- AOTPAC contributions help elect candidates who endorse occupational therapy concerns

EXPAND OUR MISSION

- Occupational therapy is not fully understood in the political arena where health care decisions are being made
- Occupational therapy must have an advocacy presence to **protect the practice of occupational therapy** and access to services for our clients

Comparison of AOTPAC with other PACs

PAC	Association Membership	Mean Professional Salaries*	Receipts
AOTA PAC	60,000	\$81,900 (OT) \$56,070 (OTA)	\$196,833
APTA PAC	100,000	\$85,400 (PT) \$45,290 (PTA)	\$594,856
ASHA PAC	198,000	\$74,680 (SLP) \$75,980 (audiologist)	\$222,423

*Mean Salaries according to United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018)
Updated: 3/20/19

2020 Election Contributions

Massachusetts
U.S. House of Representatives
Clark, Katherine (D-MA-05)
McGovern, James (D-MA-02)
Neal, Richard (D-MA-01)

New Hampshire
U.S. House of Representatives
Kuster, Ann (D-NH-02)

Connecticut
U.S. House of Representatives
Hayes, Jahana (D-CT-05)
Larson, John (D-CT-01)

<https://www.aota.org/-/media/Corporate/Files/Secure/Advocacy/AOTPAC/About/AOTPAC-Supported-Candidates-By-State-2020-Elections.pdf>
(AOTA log-in required, link in Chat for easier access)

1. Recommendations from AOTA members, state occupational therapy associations, or AOTA Federal Affairs staff.
2. The candidate is aligned with the goals of the occupational therapy profession.
3. The candidate supports specific legislative proposals or policies advanced by the profession.
4. If the candidate is an incumbent, they hold a key position of responsibility (i.e., chair or member of key committee or subcommittee that oversees/handles public policy important for the profession; member of majority or minority leadership).
5. If the candidate is a non-incumbent, they express an understanding of occupational therapy or have served in a state/local elected position and supported OT policy/legislation, and/or have expressed an interest in pursuing assignment to a key committee or subcommittee, or will likely be in a position to assist the profession.
6. The candidate has a unique relationship with the profession and therefore understands the value of OT services (e.g., a family member is an OT practitioner or student, they have received OT services, or they have worked directly with OT practitioners).

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Questions?

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Join the Ambassador Program or participate in the AOTPAC Student Challenge!

www.aota.org/AOTPAC
www.aota.org/takeaction