

Advocacy Guide for Debt Ceiling Negotiations

What is the debt ceiling negotiation and why does it matter to me?

The debt ceiling is the maximum amount of money that the United States government is allowed to borrow in a particular year. In theory, the debt ceiling exists to limit how much money the United States borrows, so they do not borrow too much money and cannot pay it back. In practice, the federal government often raises the debt ceiling so that the government can borrow enough money to avoid default (running out of money).

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told Congress on May 1st that the debt limit (ceiling) will be reached by June 1st. This means the federal government will run out of the money it needs to pay for its debts unless the ceiling is raised by June 1st.

One way to think of the debt ceiling is that it is like a credit card. You have a limit on a credit card and when you get too close to the limit, you can either call the bank to raise it, or if you go over it, you get all sorts of fees and your interest rate goes up. You cannot use it until you pay it off. For the country, not raising the debt ceiling means we can't pay our bills and we can't borrow more money.

If the United States does not pay its bills, it could have a huge negative impact on our economy, including an extended period of economic decline. It could also impact Social Security if the government cannot make payments. The U.S. has never gone over the debt ceiling, so the full extent of harm is unknown.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and other Representatives stated that they will not lift the debt ceiling without making significant cuts to domestic spending, programs that support health care, education, and employment. The House narrowly passed a bill called the [Limit, Save, Grow Act](#) on April 26th that will raise the government's debt ceiling for one year in exchange for significant cuts to programs important to people with disabilities. These cuts

would be locked in place for the next decade. The bill includes [work requirements](#) for all people who receive Medicaid that could result in millions of people losing access to Medicaid health care and supports such as home and community-based services. People with disabilities would need a doctor or other medical professional to deem them “physically or mentally unfit for employment” to be exempt from the work requirements. States would also have to educate, mandate and implement requirements. See this [two minute video](#) that explains the situation in plain language.

How do I advocate to prevent cuts?

Education and advocacy can look like many different things. You can Tweet or post on Facebook tagging your Senators and Representatives; you can write a letter or call the offices of your Senators and Representatives; you can attend district meetings with your Senators and Representatives or their staff; or you can organize or attend events in your community rallies and protests.

Remember, if you work for a program receiving federal funding, like a University Center for Excellence or Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities program, [you cannot lobby while working](#). You CAN educate policymakers, but remember to check with your supervisor about your University rules.

Ways to Educate and/or Advocate

How to find social media accounts

- 1) If you do not know who your Senators and Representatives are, use this [Action Center](#). All you need to do is enter your address. A sample letter [asking your Member of Congress to raise the debt limit] is included.
- 2) Use this [resource created by Triage Cancer](#) to find Members of Congress’ Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Tweet with Usernames

- [@Your Member's Twitter Username] Raising the debt ceiling without cuts to Medicaid and other programs is important because it is estimated that over 21 million individuals, including those with disabilities, could lose access to Medicaid. #CareNotCuts
- [@Your Member's Twitter Username] Raise the debt ceiling and put together a budget through the normal appropriations process. #CareNotCuts

Facebook Post

- As your constituent, [@Name of Member], over 21 million individuals could lose Medicaid. Raise the debt ceiling without any cuts to Medicaid, and other programs like Social Security, and SNAP. Support funding for programs that help people with disabilities and protect Medicaid from cuts and difficult work requirements.
- [@Name of Member] Raise the debt ceiling and negotiate the budget through the traditional appropriations process so people with disabilities do not lose access to Medicaid and other critical programs.

Write

Use our [Action Alert](#) to easily email your Members of Congress. Be sure to edit your letter to include personal stories. All you need is your zip code!

Call Script

Call your Member of Congress with the script below and ask them to take action. Follow the steps below.

- Call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 (voice) or (202) 224-3091 (TTY). Ask to be connected to your Representative or Senator.

Script and Talking Points

- Hi, my name is [NAME]. I am a constituent from [STATE/TERRITORY].
- Talking Points:

- Support funding for programs that help people with Autism and other disabilities.
- Protect Medicaid from cuts and difficult work requirements.
- Medicaid is important to helping people with disabilities live at home and in the community. Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services should be expanded, not cut. People with disabilities are on long waiting lists for this.
- Medicaid is an essential program that 88 million Americans rely on for their health care, including 54 million seniors, kids, and people with disabilities.
- Work requirements do not work. A work requirement policy imposed by the state of Arkansas in 2018 on Medicaid participants, which Speaker McCarthy's proposal mirrors, failed to achieve its stated goal of boosting employment, [according to research led by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#). Instead, the study found, the policy harmed health care coverage and access.
- Do not cut other programs that support working families, such as housing, education, employment, food assistance, and health care.
- Raise the debt ceiling without conditions and negotiate budget priorities through the regular budget and appropriations process.
- For more talking points, see [analyses](#) provided by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Meet with Members of Congress

You do not have to travel to Washington, DC to visit your Member of Congress. You can meet them or their staff in their district office. To find information on how to set-up District Office Meetings, including email templates and steps, [refer to these resources from the Association of University Centers on Disabilities](#) (scroll down) and this [toolkit created by the Coalition on Human Needs](#).