



Sonja L. Nesbit*

SENIOR GOVERNMENT RELATIONS DIRECTOR

Sonja provides strategic policy advice and advocates on behalf of a wide variety of clients across several industry sectors, including health, tax, trade, and education policy.



Industries

Health Care
Life Sciences

Practices

Government Relations

Education

University of Connecticut MPA, 2000
Virginia Commonwealth University BA,
Political Science, Psychology, 1994

Offices

Washington, DC

Phone

202.857.6089

Email

sonja.nesbit@arentfox.com

A primary focus for Sonja is counseling and advocating on behalf of hospitals, health systems, device and drug manufacturers, professional medical societies, and patient groups.

Sonja served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Legislation in the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under President Obama. She also was a senior staff member for the US House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee for more than a decade. As a result of many years of service, Sonja has developed a reputation among policy staff and stakeholders as a collegial and effective negotiator on legislative issues.

**Sonja is not a member of the legal practice.*

Client Work

Sonja has extensive experience in working with key decision-makers at the center of health care and tax policy debates in Washington, DC, and has a deep understanding of the legislative and regulatory processes that are of concern to firm clients. Since joining Arent Fox, Sonja has advocated for and provided strategic advice on health care, federal tax, and human services policies to hospital systems, trade associations, pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, one of the largest medical schools in the nation, and others to help them achieve their long- and short-term federal policy goals and position their organizations for success.

Sonja regularly collaborates with clients on issues that include the annual appropriations process, the 340B program, Ryan White Act funding for HIV/AIDS programs, Teaching Health Centers Graduate Medical Education (THCGME), Children's Hospitals Graduate Medical Education (CHGME), federal oversight of drug compounding, and federal research on medical marijuana. Sonja also routinely provides guidance to clients with sensitive matters involving the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

Some examples of Sonja's recent successes include:

- Co-leading a federal lobbying initiative for a health care association. Sonja worked with colleagues to lead an informal coalition of stakeholder associations in 2016-2018 and helped secure enactment of a two-year reauthorization for a graduate medical education program as well as a doubling of the funding for this program that was created in the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The effort involved negotiations with key Members of Congress, staff from the Energy and Commerce and HELP Committees, and leadership staff, helping to coordinate fly-ins by Association members, working closely with other stakeholder groups, preparing the client to testify before Congress, and helping to direct social media efforts to draw attention to the need to fund the program.
- Serves as the Executive Director for a trade association comprised of the nation's largest group purchasing organizations that are committed to voluntarily adhering to the highest ethical standards and business practices. As the Executive Director, Sonja oversees the day-to-day operations of the Association, coordinates the Association's annual best practices seminar, and drafts an annual report that describes how its Association members meet ethical standards and best business practices.
- Serves as one of the lobbyists for a leading global biopharmaceutical company that develops plasma and orphan drugs for the treatment of rare conditions for patients. Sonja helped the company work directly with senior congressional tax staff to reduce the company's financial exposure during the development of the 2017 tax reform legislation. Sonja is currently helping the company in its effort to secure introduction of bipartisan legislation to clarify applicability of a provision included in the ACA.
- Helped a pharmaceutical trade association get legislation introduced and passed in the US House of Representatives to encourage the FDA to promote the development of prescription drugs that contain abuse deterrent formulations to help address the opioid epidemic.
- Helped a skilled nursing facility with a number of locations receive an expedited CMS appeals hearing. The facility was at risk of losing millions of dollars as a result of losing its certification to provide services reimbursed under the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Through strategic outreach to Members of Congress and their staff in Washington and in the Members' District offices, the client's case received attention from senior officials in the Office of the Secretary of HHS and CMS.

Previous Work

Prior to joining Arent Fox, Sonja spent 14 years on the Ways and Means Committee staff and in the Executive Branch working with Members of Congress and their staffs from both parties to pass legislation that advanced the legislative agendas of the Obama Administration and the Committee on Ways and Means. Sonja has a proven track record on Capitol Hill. She worked closely with House Leadership to secure a two-year funding extension totaling over \$5 billion in the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015, which provided additional funding for community health centers, the National Health Service Corps, and Teaching Health Centers Graduate Medical Education. Sonja helped to secure passage of the Sunscreen Innovation Act of 2014 (FDA) and the PEPFAR Stewardship and Oversight Act of 2014. She has also handled a variety of issues including working with CMS to negotiate and resolve Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement program compliance issues for tribal hospitals and expand Medicaid eligibility for certain populations. She worked on the implementation of the ACA, including the expansion of funding for health centers and graduate medical education, and the implementation of the law in Indian Country.

As a presidentially appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary for Legislation, Sonja served as the Obama Administration's principal HHS congressional representative before Members, their staffs, and outside organizations on a variety of issues including the 340B program, graduate medical education, community health centers, rural hospitals, organ procurement guidelines, and the Indian Health Services. Sonja collaborated with the Department's congressional oversight counsel, who is responsible for complying with congressional oversight requests for information and documentation. She also teamed with other senior officials in the Department to respond to Inspector General findings related to the 340B and Community Health Centers programs. Prior to her appointment, Sonja served as the Deputy Staff Director for the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources for more than a decade. During her tenure, she worked with the Committee's tax staff on issues related to the Federal Unemployment Tax Credits, including the SUTA Dumping Prevention Act of 2004, and the expansion of the certain tax credits (i.e., the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and the Adoption Tax Credit) in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2010. She also worked on tax provisions related to charitable foundations and with the Committee's trade staff on the Omnibus Trade Act of 2010.

Publications, Presentations, and Recognitions

Sonja's awards include:

- First Focus *Campaign for Children 2011 Champion for Children*, recognizing the top leaders in Congress working to make children and families a national priority in federal policy and budget decisions.

Sonja's publications include:

- Author, "The Outlook on Repealing and Replacing the ACA," *AHLA Weekly*, December 2016
- Co-Author, "Is a National Retail Sales Tax In Our Future?" *Tax Notes*; September 2004 (Vol. 104, NO. 12)