Following the September 21 AEVR event, on September 22, the twenty-one EVS participants conducted 45 Congressional office visits, both in person and virtual, including several with Members of Congress who wanted to hear directly about the concerns of early-stage investigators. Mr. Ignaszewski and NAEVR Director of Government Relations David Epstein, each joined several visits throughout the day.

In their meetings, the EVS advocates thanked Congress for NIH/NEI funding increases in the FY2016-2022 timeframe. In requesting that Congress finalize FY2023 appropriations in a timely fashion—with continued increases for NIH/NEI—they also cautioned about the detrimental impact that Continuing Resolutions (CRs) can have on research, including delaying awards or requiring researchers to seek “bridge” funding while awaiting funding, something all the participants had some experience with.

The advocates reiterated NAEVR’s request for FY2023 NEI funding of $950 million, to rebuild the NEI’s base funding level after years of increases that have failed to keep pace with inflation. They also expressed that while the House-passed funding level of $891.2 million is still short of what is needed, that is preferable to the draft Senate bill which would fund the NEI slightly lower at a level of $890.7 million.

Several of the EVS participants shared a one-page graphic of their research emphasizing the potential benefit and return on the federal investment.

Per NAEVR’s training at a preparatory breakfast, the participants offered to serve as a reference on vision issues for their delegation offices and invited Members and staff to visit their department or School/College.

The advocacy didn’t end in Washington for two of the EVSs. On her flight home, Angelica Scanzera, OD (University of Illinois) was seated next to her Congressman, Jesus “Chuy” Garcia (D-IL), whose staff Dr. Scanzera had met with earlier in the day and was interested in hearing about her research. And on her Amtrak back home, Cui Qi, MD, PhD, was seated next to Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), who, though not from her home state, was still very interested in hearing the message about the importance of robust federal funding for eye and vision research.

"Thank you for your efforts in making this a success was truly outstanding and was evident in the seamless transition between meetings to the extensive details that were provided for each task. Mainly the wealth of information that I have acquired during these few days will be beneficial even in any future advocacy events that I participate in at the University or broader scientific community."

—Tasneem Sharma, PhD (Indiana University School of Medicine)

“I really enjoyed sharing my research with colleagues and guests, and further developing my advocacy skills.” —Carlos Parra, PhD (New York University)