

## COMMITMENT TO ADVOCACY

BY SAMANTHA VILLELLA, MS ACTIVIST AND MS AMBASSADOR

At the conclusion of the National MS Society's Public Policy Conference in 2015, I was extended an invitation to become a District Activist Leader. Throughout the following year, I worked with Congressman Tim Ryan and his staff regarding important public policies, participated on the Ohio Buckeye Chapter's Government Relations Committee and served as a volunteer as needed.

In my activist role, I was privileged to be able to attend this year's conference, held March 14-16, 2016 in Washington D.C. Two days were spent educating everyone about the public policies, hearing inspirational stories and recognizing individuals for their commitment to the cause. Prepared and eager, everyone embarked on Capitol Hill to visit with their elected officials on the third day.

Besides sharing my advocacy journey, my favorite part of the day was seeing the sea of orange overtaking "The Hill." It was heartwarming.

I have learned so much about political protocol and the Society's advocacy efforts as well as important life lessons. I have learned that while you are advocating you need to remain open-minded, stay true to your story and speak from the heart.

I realized that when you share your journey you have an opportunity to make an impact on your leaders and their decisions. I have also learned that you should not take anything for granted. We easily forget this important life lesson through

the day-to-day hustle of life, but we must try to remember to appreciate everything.

I discovered that many Society employees have been working with the organization for years and have formed bonds with people who have MS, caregivers and their family and friends.

They are not here because it is a job, but because they believe in the cause. Most important, I have learned that many people are coming together to find a cure.



**SAMANTHA VILLELLA AND CONGRESSMAN TIM RYAN.**

It was an honor to have been a part of the 25th Annual Public Policy Conference. I met so many inspiring advocates and volunteers. I'm humbled to be a part of this group who dedicate so much time and energy to the commitment of ending MS forever. I plan to continue being an advocate for my mom, my sister and everyone else living with MS. ■

## TRIBUTES AND MEMORIALS

If you want to honor someone with MS or have lost a loved one, please consider naming the Ohio Buckeye Chapter of the National MS Society as the charity of your choice for donations. All contributions help to support local services and fund MS-related research efforts. All tributes and memorials are appreciated. ■