

TIPS ON MEETING WITH POLICYMAKERS

From your local city council to your Senators in Washington, meeting with your elected officials about civil liberties issues is a lot easier than most people think. Remember, policymakers work for you!

What is a lobby visit? A lobby visit is merely a meeting for you to tell your elected representative what you think about a certain issue or bill, and to try to get him or her to take action on that issue.

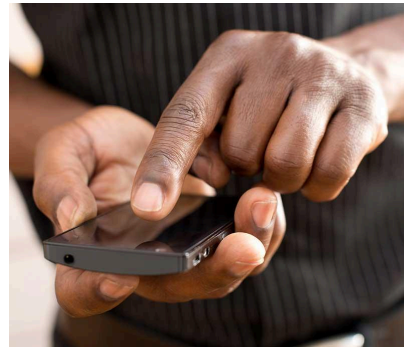
Where can you meet? It's not necessary to travel to Washington—every Member of Congress (MoC) also has one or more offices in their congressional district. Even though the Member is not in the local office(s) very much, there is a permanent staff member at each office with whom you can meet.

Requesting Your Meeting

Make your request in writing and follow up with a call to the Appointment Secretary/Scheduler. Call the office and request to speak with the scheduler and/or person responsible for policy around criminal justice. You can use this sample script:

Hello, my name is _____, and I am calling from _____. I would like to schedule time to speak with (Elected Official's Name) and/or someone whose policy area is related to criminal justice and/or (ISSUE AREA). I am working to introduce legislation related to (ISSUE AREA).

(Suggest specific times and dates for your meeting.)



Make sure they know that you are a constituent, if you live within their district. If you are not from their district it would be beneficial to find someone from that district to make the call and attend the meeting with you. If this is not a viable option, it's OK! Still attempt to schedule a meeting.

Many times, schedulers will ask for an email with all the details of your request. Include one pagers and/or policy recommendations, restate the time/date of meeting request and other important details about your campaign

Increasingly, we are seeing legislators use [online meeting forms](#) — complete the details and follow up with the office within a few days to confirm receipt.

Prepare for Your Meeting

- ☐ Bring one-pagers, [policy recommendations](#), and other supplemental documents as materials that you can leave with your elected official.
- ☐ Decide who will attend the meeting. Keep it small. Bring 4-5 people who represent different groups that are invested in the legislation, such as formerly incarcerated people, family

members of those currently incarcerated, doctors, religious leaders, public health officials, emergency management personnel, corrections staff, etc.

- ☐ Agree on talking points with the group that will be in attendance at the meeting.
- ☐ Plan out the flow of the meeting. It is easy to be nervous or intimidated by speaking with elected officials, especially about issues that you are passionate about. Additionally, time can be limited, so laying out your talking points and who will address what can keep the meeting on track. You may want to assign attendees to some of the following roles:
 - ☐ Conversation starter
 - ☐ Photo taker
 - ☐ Share a personal story
 - ☐ Share the data and research behind your campaign
 - ☐ Closer — make the final ask of the legislator
- ☐ Research the elected official prior to your meeting. Take a look at their voting record specific to criminal justice issues.

During the Meeting

- ☐ Establish your legitimacy as a constituent or subject matter expert during introductions.
- ☐ Be prompt and patient. Elected officials run on very tight schedules. Be sure to show up on time for your appointment, and be patient. It is not uncommon for legislators to be late or to have your meeting interrupted by other business.
- ☐ Keep it short and focused! On average, you will have 15-20 minutes with an elected official/staff person. Stick to talking points and deliver your message clearly.
- ☐ Bring up any personal, professional, or political connections to the elected official that you may have. Use the opening of the meeting to thank the legislator for any work they have done, i.e., votes, letters, legislation, etc. You always want the legislator or staff to realize you know a great deal about them or their boss.
- ☐ Make it conversational. Yes, there is a short window, however engaging the member or staffer in a dialogue helps to make your pitch feel more genuine and less like a salesperson.
- ☐ Stick to your talking points! Stay on topic, and back them up with printed materials that you will leave with your elected official.
- ☐ Provide personal stories and examples of impact. Always try to tie the issue back to whatever that legislator is trying to promote as part of their “brand.” You can often find this on their website or campaign page (which reflects how they want to be seen). For example if they champion that they fight for fiscal responsibility speak to how this aligns with their vision because of the cost-savings benefits.
- ☐ If you don't know the answer to a question, it's OK! It's better to say, “I can get back to you with that specific information” rather than giving inaccurate information that damages your credibility. Following up, usually via email, gives you the chance to stay relevant and shows your dedication.
- ☐ Set deadlines for a response. Legislators may not be ready to make a full commitment in your meeting with them. If they have to think about it, or if you are meeting with a staff member, ask

when you should check back in to find out what your legislator intends to do about your request. Set a clear timeline for when this will happen.

- ❑ Make sure your ask of the elected official is clear. “We want you to sponsor legislation, including bill drafting and introduction, that will XXX. Will your office commit to making this a reality?”
Don’t settle for non-answers.

Close the Meeting by Letting Them Know that You’ll Be Back.

- ❑ Your MoC works for you. Let them or their District Director know that you’ll be back as often as it takes to make sure that your voice is heard. Get the contact information of everyone you meet with and send a follow-up email when you get home.

Record It or It Didn’t Happen.

- ❑ Get a picture of your group at the office or, better yet, get a video of your group before, during, and after your visit.
- ❑ Then, send it to us so we can help amplify your efforts. Include a description of the video, the name of your group, and the names of the people in the video/picture
- ❑ *Note: Please familiarize yourself with your state and local laws that govern recording, along with any applicable Senate or House rules, prior to recording. These laws and rules vary substantially from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.*

After the Meeting

- ❑ Right after the meeting, debrief with your group on their thoughts as to how the meeting ran. Discuss what follow-ups need to occur and who can help support you with that information.
- ❑ Send a personal thank you letter to legislative members/staffers with whom you’ve met.
- ❑ Follow up, within a week, with any requested materials and information (the faster the better).
- ❑ If the elected official or staff member doesn't meet the deadline, ask him or her to set another deadline. Be persistent and flexible!

If you are meeting with a member of Congress or State Legislators, let the JustUS Coordinating Council know what you learned during your meeting by sending an e-mail to policycomms@justuscc.org. Knowing what arguments your member used, what issues are important to them, and what positions they took will help us make the table more effective.