



we are one family under God

How to Set Up an In-District Meeting with your Lawmaker: TIPS and BEST PRACTICES

"We need to participate for the common good. Sometimes we hear: a good Catholic is not interested in politics. This is not true: good Catholics immerse themselves in politics by offering the best of themselves so that the leader can govern."

-- Pope Francis, September 16, 2013

JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS- Convened by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS), the Justice for Immigrants (JFI) coalition joins together a diverse set of Catholic organizations with national networks in an effort to unite and mobilize a growing group of Catholic institutions, individuals, and other persons of goodwill in support of immigrants and refugees. To learn more about JFI, please visit: <https://justiceforimmigrants.org/>.

- Find your lawmakers and their local offices by visiting the following
 - Senators: <http://bit.ly/1kyGkev>
 - Representatives: <http://bit.ly/1e8pAws>
- Call your lawmaker's office and ask for the names of the schedulers so that you can send the requests directly to those staffers.
- Send your formal meeting request in writing to the office's scheduler. Remember that there might be a district/state scheduler and a DC scheduler.
- If you already have a staff contact in an office, consider cc'ing your contact in the meeting request.
- Gather before the meeting and discuss with your partners what role each will take and who will cover which issues or talking points.
- Your entire group should arrive at least five minutes early to the meeting.
- At the meeting, always get a business card of the staffer you are meeting with or the staffer(s) attending the meeting with the lawmaker.
- Maintain a respectful tone. Do not be confrontational or overly argumentative.
- Assign one person in your group to take thorough notes.
- Post on social media as soon as possible any photos you take at the meeting. If using Twitter, tweet at the Member so that they can re-tweet the picture(s). Also tweet to @USCCBJFI
- That evening or the next morning, send a thank you email to the scheduler, the staffer(s) you met at the meeting, and any other staffers who assisted in securing the meeting.
- Complete any "follow up" you committed to completing- such as getting a report. Ask JFI staff for help if you necessary.
- Send copies of your meeting notes and business cards of staffers to acube@usccb.org

Remember to keep the following best practices in mind when setting up a visit and meeting with your U.S. Senator or Member of Congress:

- Be courteous. Ask politely both in formally asking (in writing) for a meeting and during the meeting itself.
- Try to be flexible. Provide options for meeting dates and times. Consider meeting at your lawmaker's office or at another location that is convenient for their time and schedule. Even after a meeting is set, a new conflict on the lawmaker's schedule may require changing your meeting to a different time or day. Try to keep your meeting for the current recess and ask what other dates are open on their schedule.
- Be Willing to Meet with a Staff Person. If you are unable to get a meeting with your lawmaker, ask to meet with a staff member instead.
- Look to Engage Both Offices When Scheduling (Part 3).
If the scheduler in the district or state office cannot accommodate your meeting request, send a request to your lawmaker's Washington, DC office. You can also ask the DC scheduler to set up a meeting with DC staffer traveling to the state or district for the recess.
- Be persistent. If the Member's office cannot accommodate your request, ask someone higher ranking in your parish, diocese or organization to request a meeting for your group.
- Keep your meeting group small. Keep your group to five or six people. Ideally, your group will be the Member's constituents.
- All politics is local. Start your meeting with introductions and say which church you attend. Tell your lawmaker or their staffer who you represent, how many families are in your parish or staff at your agency, and what services you provide. When possible, connect them with their district or locality. For example, "My Catholic Charities agency is four stops away from your office on Bus A20." Or, "Law students from your alma mater volunteer at our immigration legal clinic."
- Know your stuff. Provide "leave behind packet" that does not contain too much paper. For these meetings our JFI Appropriations package is perfect! Keep to the point of the meeting topic and use your talking points. When possible, your information should contain district or state specific information. Anticipate their questions and have your answers prepared. Do not make up answers, but offer to follow up after the meeting. Wait until closer to the end of the meeting before handing over the packet.
- Demonstrate that you intend to cultivate an ongoing working relationship.
Offer to host a town hall or similar event for the Member at your parish. Invite them to take a tour of one of your agency's direct services locations. Ask if the lawmaker wants to participate as a VIP at one of your future events. If they or other staff members are Catholic, invite them to attend a Mass at your parish that is convenient to their schedule.
- Take a picture.
After the meeting, politely ask if you can take a picture with them. Tell them you want to share the photo on social media. If they are unwilling, take a picture of just your group in front of the sign just outside of the lawmaker's office.

Finally, remember that you are your lawmakers' constituents. They may disagree with you on some issues, but they do return to their districts and states in order to hear from people like you, and to keep up to date on what is important to the people they represent in Washington, DC. It is up to you to convey to them the Catholic message in support of immigrants and refugees and their families.