



## Scheduling an In-district Meeting

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.  
Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Proverbs 31:8-9

Meeting with your elected Members of Congress is a powerful way to raise the profile of issues you care about and to effect change. It is difficult for Members of Congress and their staff to be well-versed on every issue, so this is an opportunity to educate them. You do not need to be a scholar or expert to make a contribution to a policy maker's understanding of abuses and oppression suffered by IJM's clients. Remember, meeting with constituents is part of our elected officials' job. It is also how policy-makers gauge what is important to those living in his/her district or state. And it is how we help decide our government's priorities.

Just like everyone else, Members of Congress are impacted by personal relationships. So think about your meeting in terms of one step in a long-term process of relationship building. Consider who might be the best people to bring with you to an in-district meeting (a prominent person in your community, someone with first-hand experience of the issue, etc). Also, do a little background research and consider what element of the issue will engage your Member of Congress on a personal level.

### Tips for Scheduling an in-district meeting:

- Plan ahead. Members' schedules fill up quickly. They are generally in the district when Congress is on recess (check out the congressional schedule at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)) and on Mondays and Fridays.
- Call your district office (contact information is available through [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)) and find out who the Members' scheduler is for in-district meetings.
- Fax a meeting request to the scheduler. Be sure to explain your purpose, who you are, and who will be attending the meeting. See IJM's sample meeting request.
- Follow up is key! An office may not respond to your request if you don't help to make sure it gets noticed. You may need to call more than once to make sure your meeting gets on the agenda. Always be polite and respectful.
- It is likely that your meeting will be with a legislative aide, and not the Member of Congress. Meeting with an aide is still worthwhile! Aides will often recommend positions to Members of Congress, and making sure that they are well informed and aware of support in the district is very important.
- Once you have a meeting scheduled, be sure to contact IJM's Justice Campaigns Director Eileen Campbell at [ecampbell@ijm.org](mailto:ecampbell@ijm.org). We can help you prepare for the meeting, and figure out the most

important message to convey to your particular Member of Congress. We can also provide you with materials to deliver at the meeting, and walk through the meeting with you.

- Before attending, make sure that everyone coming with you is clear on the purpose of the meeting and is on the same page. It is important that everyone communicate the same message, and refrain from bringing up peripheral issues. Make sure everyone has relevant background information so that they are prepared to answer general questions.

### **Tips for a Successful In-district Meeting:**

- Be prompt. Members of Congress and their staff have busy schedules.
- Bring background materials for the Member and their staff.
- Have everyone in the meeting introduce themselves. It is appropriate to allow for a little bit of time to establish a personal connection with the Member or aide.
- Explain upfront why you are there in one or two sentences.
- Consider how to frame the issue you care about from the Members' perspective. Think about what motivates them. What might engage them personally? Try to demonstrate a connection to the interests of your district/state. Who else cares about this issue? Is this issue important to your church? Feel free to share (briefly) a story about how you personally came to care about this issue and/or why it affects you personally. Try to make your case in no more than 3-5 minutes (this can take practice). Keep in mind that your meeting might be interrupted, so be sure to get to the point early on in the meeting.
- Be accurate. Knowing your facts helps establish you as a credible resource.
- Listen. The meeting should be a two way conversation, and you can learn a lot about your Members' views and priorities by listening well.
- Be prepared to answer questions, but don't feel like you need to know the answer to every question they might ask, and never make anything up. It is perfectly fine to tell the Member or aide that you will get back to them with the information they requested.
- Offer to be a resource.
- Don't leave without asking for a commitment. "Can I count on you to...?"
- Always thank the Member and/or aide for taking the time to meet with you. Let them know how to stay in touch with you.
- Follow up within the week with a thank you note. If the Member does what you've asked, be sure to thank them and, if possible, commend them publicly.

### **Things to avoid:**

- Don't stretch the truth.
- Don't make anything up.
- You can express disappointment, but don't get angry in the meeting. Successful advocacy involves building long-term relationships with policy-makers and a meeting is just one step in the process. Plus, you never know who might change their mind.
- Don't get into partisan political conversations. IJM is non-partisan. We need Members and Senators from across the political spectrum to support U.S. polices to confront injustice against the poorest.

Please make the issue an attractive to your Member of Senator, regardless of what your own personal views might be on their political party or voting record.