

# IN-DISTRICT AND REMOTE ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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2021

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# Introduction

## In-District and Remote Advocacy are Critical for Reform

Building and maintaining strong relationships with Members of Congress is essential to achieving your advocacy goals. For this reason, engaging with Senators, Representatives, and their staff, should be a top priority for juvenile justice advocates. Many advocates, however, worry that their inability to travel to Washington, D.C. frequently, if at all, minimizes their impact on federal advocacy. This may be especially true for some in this moment, as COVID-19 halts travel and results in temporary restrictions on visitation to the Capitol and its buildings.

Don't let this stop you, though. Advocacy goes beyond face-to-face meetings in DC. Federal advocacy starts at home, where Senators and Representatives are elected by their constituents. They represent you, and your voice is what is most important to them. Engaging with Members of Congress both in-district and remotely is not only more feasible logistically for most advocates, but also provides valuable opportunities to build meaningful relationships with Members and their staff.

Advocacy can take place even now. With the effects of COVID-19 halting travel for the foreseeable future, it has become difficult if not impossible for the time being to engage in in-person advocacy. There are still ways to make your voice heard while social distancing. Luckily, we live in an age where many things can be done remotely. Just because you cannot meet with people in person does not mean that meetings cannot happen. This toolkit includes tips and ideas for advocating digitally and communicating with Congress from home.

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## Where to Begin?

This toolkit will be your guide. It will begin with the different ways you can engage with your Senator or Representative both in-district and remotely, followed by a step-by-step guide for how to meet with a Member of Congress, attend a town hall, plan a site visit, use social media and technology to advocate, and write an editorial or letter to the editor. This toolkit includes a mix of pointers for advocacy, both during social distancing and after restrictions are lifted. You will also find Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) advocacy priorities and briefing sheets to be used as leave-behinds for your Member. We hope this toolkit provides a foundation for in-district and remote federal advocacy and serves as a building block for strong and meaningful relationships with your Members of Congress.

# In-District and Remote Advocacy

## Building Relationships for Change



All around the country, states are transforming their juvenile justice systems. With the help of private initiatives, like the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI), the Pew Charitable Trusts, and others, jurisdictions are using new approaches to create safer and more effective systems for youth, families, and communities. While private dollars have fueled much of this reform,

this money has, in some instances, been shifted to new programs. State budgets, meanwhile, are positioned to see major reductions due to COVID-19. Federal funding now plays an even more critical role in delinquency prevention and intervention. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), recently reauthorized by Congress, not only protects youth in custody by prescribing core protections,

but also supports programs that reduce reliance on detention and incarceration, are cost effective, and result in better outcomes for youth, families, and communities. Over the past eighteen years, federal dollars have been cut drastically, down almost 50% since 2002.<sup>1</sup> Given this fiscal and political climate, relationships with Members of Congress are more important than ever. Let's continue strengthening ours!

## Advocacy Tip #1

Always be respectful, but assertive. This is the golden rule. Whether you are interacting with your Member of Congress in person, through a letter, or via social media, you want to leave the best impression on your Member and his or her staff. No one likes to deal with people who are rude.

Remember too, that being polite does not mean you cannot ask questions or discuss pressing issues with your Member. So long as you treat your Member with respect and courtesy, all topics are on the table, and your Member and their staff will be happy to maintain a relationship with you.



# How to Engage Remotely and In-District

## Opportunities to Interact with Members of Congress

District work periods and Friday-Monday are often the perfect time to interact with your Member of Congress and show your support for federal programs that fund juvenile justice programs and services. Whether you are a service provider, practitioner, police officer, clergy member, youth, student, family member, or community member, you are a constituent, and you have an important voice.

There are many ways that you can engage with your Members of Congress when they are in-district and remotely while they are in DC. Here are some examples:

- Schedule a socially distanced meeting at the District Office if appropriate;
- Schedule a call or video-chat meeting with a staffer;
- Attend a virtual Town Hall meeting;
- Invite your Member for a socially distanced site or program visit, if appropriate, or use video chat; or
- Write an editorial or letter to the editor.

## 2021 Dates to Remember

Please keep the list of currently scheduled in-district work periods in mind as you plan your advocacy. Also note that these dates may change with the COVID-19 pandemic. Check Congress' website and with the CDC to make sure travel is safe and permitted and to learn more about when you can engage remotely while they are in D.C.

### Senate

March 25 - April 9

May 3-7

May 31 - June 4

June 28 - July 9

Aug. 9 - Sept. 10

Sept. 16-17

Oct. 11-15

Nov. 8-12

Nov. 22-26

Dec. 13-31

### House of Representatives

March 29 - 31

April 1 - 9

May 31

June 1-4

July 5-9

Aug. 2-27

Sept. 6-8; 15-17

November 22-26

# Advocacy in an Era of Digital Communication

## Communicating With Your Member

COVID-19 has halted much non-essential travel. Luckily, we live in an age where many things can be done remotely, including advocacy. Just because you cannot meet with people in person does not mean that meetings cannot happen. Staffers and members of Congress are still working and communicating with constituents.

Phone meetings, virtual town halls, video meetings, social media, and even writing a letter can still allow you to connect with your representatives. Staffers may still be able to meet by phone or through a video platform, such as Skype or Zoom. Send an email requesting a virtual meeting, and prepare as if you were meeting face-to-face.

Personalize your online interactions with representatives. Recording a video or posting pictures can help humanize issues that you are advocating for and show your members exactly who is affected by legislation and why it matters to you.

Organizations such as CJJ and Act4JJ also offer opportunities to enact change via social media. You can join in Act4JJ's #TwitterThursdays and tag a representative who you want to know about youth justice reform. CJJ also sends Calls to Action to our members to contact their legislators.

To join CJJ or to get more information, please email [info@juvjustice.org](mailto:info@juvjustice.org).

## Advocacy Tip #2

Using social media as a tool can be extremely effective if done correctly. Here are some tips to help your engagements make an impact:

- Directly tag your representative on any social media platform. Some representatives will have both personal accounts and accounts managed by their communications team. Think about who you want to reach and tag accordingly.
- Take note about their social media presence. Do they use a hashtag frequently? Do they retweet informative graphics? See if you can notice a pattern, and tailor your posts.
- Use your location. Representatives are more likely to engage with people in their district.
- Ask questions. This starts a conversation and warrants an individualized response.
- Be polite. Being kind and courteous over social media is just as crucial as it is in-person.





# In-District and Remote Meetings

## Personal Visits With Your Member in the District

Members of Congress typically travel frequently between Washington, D.C. and their districts. Scheduling a socially distanced meeting, when appropriate, with them or one of their aides at the district office can be a great way to make a connection with your Member.

Coordinating a meeting for a group of juvenile justice advocates is also an effective advocacy tool—the more constituents are concerned about an issue, the more likely the Member is to pay attention. Such meetings can take place via video or conference call as well. See how to get started below.

## Make an Appointment

Contact the appointment scheduler in your district by phone or email. If you do not know your Senators or Representatives, you can use the zip-code finder here: <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members>. This site will provide you with a direct link to your Member's webpage, where you can find contact information for the district office. When you email the district office, your request should be to the attention of the scheduler.

In your email to the scheduler, you should include what you would like to speak to the Member about and identify yourself as a constituent and State Advisory Group (SAG) member, if applicable. You should also include specific dates and times that you are available to meet. Please see the sample meeting request letter included at the end of this toolkit for your use.

If the Member is unavailable, ask to meet with the District Office Director or Legislative Director. If you do not hear back from the scheduler, be sure to call the office to follow up.

## Be Prepared and Responsive

Before your appointment, identify who in your group will talk about each specific issue. Familiarize yourself with the key points and make sure you have a succinct request for your Member.

During the meeting, be prepared to answer questions from the Member. Be sure to stay on point and not go on tangents. If applicable, offer you and/or your group's assistance to the Member. If you can get the Member to commit to doing something, such as making a floor statement, circulating a "dear colleague letter," or speaking at an event, that's a bonus.

## Following-Up

After the meeting, be sure to send a thank you letter or email to the Member. The thank you letter should restate the points you went over in the meeting and should provide any additional information that was requested or that you promised during the meeting.

If the Member made a commitment when you met, be sure to remind them of their promise in your thank you letter. You should also send a copy of the letter to CJJ so we can stay informed of your contact with Members for our own advocacy efforts in D.C.

## Advocacy Tip #3

Be patient. Closely related to Advocacy Tip #1, being polite, is being patient. Members of Congress are extremely busy people and have full schedules every day. Do not be surprised if a Member is late to a meeting or event, and be flexible with the time that the Member has to spend with you.

# Town Hall Meetings

## Start a Conversation

Town Hall meetings provide a unique opportunity to interact with your Member of Congress. Not only do you get the opportunity to ask a question about juvenile justice issues, but you get to ask it in public, on the record. Town Hall meetings allow advocates to raise the awareness of Members of Congress and other community stakeholders simultaneously —both critical partners on the path to reform.

Town Hall meetings also provide a platform for young people, family members, and others affected by the juvenile justice system to share their story. Encourage individuals you work with, who are well prepared and comfortable telling their stories, to attend these meetings and share their experience with the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Personal stories can send powerful messages to Members of Congress. Organize a group of advocates to attend a Town Hall meeting. Show your Member that there are lots of people that support your message. There is power in numbers. Coordinate ahead of time about the questions you want to ask and who will ask them. To find out where and when Town Hall meetings are being held, check your Member's website and/or social media accounts. You can also call the district office or check local news outlets. During this time of social distancing, many organizations are also holding virtual town halls that you will want to learn about and attend. This allows access to national or local events from wherever you may be in the country.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is even more crucial to remind your Member of Congress that youth need to be protected.

## Sample Question to Ask

- Federal funding for juvenile justice and delinquency prevention and intervention programs has been drastically cut over the past ten years. [Give a specific example of how this impacts your state on the ground.] How do you plan on safeguarding such important funding for our state?

## Advocacy Tip #4

Be prepared. Make sure you practice what you want to say to your Member of Congress before you interact with them. Organize your thoughts beforehand and outline your statements and ultimate ask of your Member. Your ask is what you would like them to do for you: sponsor a bill, host a briefing, circulate a "dear colleague" letter, etc.

Whether you are meeting with a Member or his or her staff, they will most definitely have questions for you. You should be able to answer basic questions about the issue you are meeting about. It's okay if you don't know the answer to a question. Never make up an answer. Instead, tell the Member or staff that you will get back to them with the appropriate information— providing a perfect opportunity for you to follow up with the office.



# Site and Program Visits

## Show Your Member What You're Talking About

Everyone knows the saying, “a picture is worth a thousand words,” and that saying holds true in advocacy as well. Having Members see a detention facility or visit a community-based program first hand speaks volumes. A site or program visit allows Members to physically see federal dollars at work.

There is, of course, a strategy behind site visits. While taking a Member to a new, cutting edge facility for a site visit is certainly worthwhile, you may consider designating a portion of the visit to an in-depth explanation of the old center and why the changes were made. Or, you may take your Member to two facilities—one exemplary and one in need of change. You want to be sure that you paint an accurate picture of what youth around the country experience daily.

Inviting Members of Congress to community-based programs is another terrific advocacy tool. Members get to interact with young people and gain a deeper understanding of the types of programs supported with federal dollars—and those that could disappear if funding continues to decline.

While in-person visits to sites may be limited or not possible at the moment, consider remote alternatives. Is there a video of the program that you can share? Is there remote-based programming you can highlight? Think strategically about what can be done safely now and what to keep in your toolbox for later dates.

## Scheduling a Visit

Scheduling a site or program visit is similar to scheduling a meeting, yet with more details and logistics. You will still likely deal directly with the district scheduler and will want to send him or her an email with an agenda for the visit, a list of who else will be attending, and dates and times for the visit. They may ask you for additional information. Always be flexible and responsive.

It is important when scheduling site or program visits that you go through all the internal channels that may exist before inviting the Member to attend. For example, are there security clearances needed? Do you have to have permission from the facility director? Are there confidentiality or safety issues to consider? Are in-person site visits permitted during this time? These questions should be brainstormed and answered before reaching out to the Member's office.



## Advocacy Tip #5

Become a resource. Members of Congress and their staff rely on constituents to feed them information about what is happening on the ground. They see constituents as experts on specific issues and will want you to provide them with the details needed to help them make a case. By offering your assistance and being reliable, you develop a strong relationship with your Member and his or her office. For example, if a bill is introduced in Congress that may impact young people in the juvenile justice system, you want to be the person your Member contacts to ask whether or not he or she should support the legislation and why.



# Op-eds and Letters to the Editor

## Advocacy Tip #6

Be specific. Federal advocacy is all about specifics. Members of Congress primarily focus on the issues that are close to home. When you interact with your Member, you should talk about why the issue is important to you. No matter who you are—a practitioner, a young person, a judge, a family member, a parole officer—you have a story. You have a reason why juvenile justice is important to you, and you should share that story with your Member of Congress. You must also link your story to a specific policy issue—why federal funding is important—and make the issue relevant to your Member by linking it to specific outcomes in your state. Without specifics, your issue sinks to the bottom rather than rising to the top. Including facts and figures to support your ask or policy position is extremely helpful when speaking with Members and their staff. Anecdotes about programs that are effective are also helpful for your advocacy.

## Speak Your Mind

Op-eds and letters to the editor are great advocacy tools that can help bolster awareness about juvenile justice issues and that can be used at any time. Both op-eds and letters to the editor allow advocates to choose and frame their issue.

When pitching an op-ed to a newspaper or other media outlet, you should ask for the editorial page editor. Introduce yourself and tell them you are interested in submitting an op-ed for placement during a specific district work period or other target date. It is helpful when writing an op-ed or letter to the editor if you can link your editorial or letter to another newsworthy item—whether that is a previously published story or an event or holiday.

There are a couple of timely hooks that you can use to increase the likelihood of having your op-ed or letter to the editor published: (1) as Congress determines their Fiscal Year 2022 appropriation levels, we should focus on investing in what works and (2) during the ongoing pandemic, it is essential that we not overlook our children and their safety.

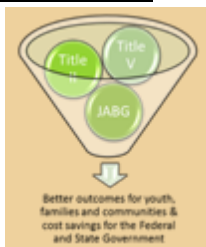
While we are practicing social distancing, letters are needed more than ever. Use this opportunity to spread the word about taking care of youth who are incarcerated during COVID-19.

## Pitching Your Work

The devil is in the details. Be sure to follow submission guidelines for both op-eds and letters to the editor. If you follow their guidelines, you automatically increase the likelihood that your piece will be published. When you send your submission, include a cover note that reminds the editor who you are and reference any prior contact you may have had. Include your contact information in the note. If you do not hear back from the publication within a week, follow up with a phone call. Make sure you are responsive to any follow up questions from the editor and offer to modify your piece if needed.

# CJJ Advocacy Priorities

## Priority 1: Fully Fund the JJDPAs & Secure Federal Funding for other Juvenile Justice Programs and Services



The federal government plays an essential role in preventing juvenile delinquency and improving the effectiveness of juvenile justice systems at the state, local, and tribal levels nationwide. When coupled with state, local, and private dollars, federal investments seed and support the development, implementation, and sustainability of optimal juvenile justice and delinquency prevention systems and practices in all 56 U.S. states, territories, and the District of Columbia, as well as in local jurisdictions. There are three main federal funding sources for juvenile justice and delinquency prevention:

### Title II State Formula Grants

These grants support state efforts to comply with federal standards for the care of youth in the justice system, has been cut by more than 30% since 2002.

### Title V Local Delinquency Prevention Program

This is the only federal program designed to prevent delinquency at the local level in coordination with a statewide prevention plan, has been slashed by more than 70%. Of the Title V funds appropriated over the last nine years, between 53 and 100 percent have been set aside for non-JJDPAs programs.

### The Juvenile Accountability Block Grant.

This block grant provides local judges, law enforcement officers, corrections officials and providers with a range of options to address the needs and behaviors of court-involved youth, has been significantly reduced, and in recent years has been completely zeroed out.

Since 2002, federal investments in programs that prevent and reduce delinquency have been slashed nearly in half. During that same time, federal spending on police, prosecution and incarceration has increased by more than 60%.<sup>2</sup>

On average, it costs \$407.58 a day - around \$148,767 a year - to incarcerate a young person.<sup>3</sup> The return on this investment is an average recidivism rate of 55%.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, community-based alternatives to incarceration for court-involved youth cost as little as \$75 a day and reduce recidivism by an average of 22% when compared to incarceration.<sup>5</sup>

## Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2022 & COVID-19 Emergency Response

Before October 1st, Congress must approve federal spending for discretionary programs, including juvenile justice funding for state programs. For FY 2022, we are asking for full funding of the JJDPAs as authorized by Congress in 2018. We request \$176 million dollars for Titles II & V of the Act, including:

- *\$80 million for Title II to help states comply with the JJDPAs and promote delinquency prevention.*
- *\$96,053,401 for Title V, with 11% going to support the Tribal Youth Program and the remainder to support PROMISE grants.*
- *\$30 million to fund the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant Reauthorization and Bullying Prevention and Intervention Act of 2019 (H.R. 494).*

In addition, we ask Congress to approve \$75 million in rapid response grants through Title II of the JJDPAs for increased testing, vaccines and personal protective equipment for youth in facilities, and to provide supports for youth returning home.

# Resources to Share

It is helpful when meeting with Congress to have materials you can share to help educate them about your issue area. To that end, CJJ and our partners within the Act 4 Juvenile Justice Coalition have created the following fact sheets and briefing materials that you can print and bring to your meetings, or email to your Member and their staff either in advance, or as a follow up measure.

- [2022 Appropriations](#): This sheet gives an overview of CJJ's request to appropriators for Fiscal Year year 2022.
- [Juvenile Justice](#): This one-pager summarizes our key federal asks for 2021.
- [Investing in what works](#): This sheet outlines what the JJDPA is and what the benefits are of full implementation.
- [The Valid Court Order Exception](#): As initially enacted, the JJDPA included a blanket prohibition on incarcerating youth for status offense behaviors. An amendment added in the 1980s created what is not known as the valid court order (VCO) exception, a provision that enables states to incarcerate youth who are found in violation of a valid court order. This sheet explains the VCO exception and the importance of phasing it out.
- [Historical Funding Chart](#): This resource looks at federal juvenile justice appropriations and how they have changed in recent years.
- [Recommendations to the 117th Congress](#): This resource details the Coalition for Juvenile Justice's recommendations to the 117th Congress. These include restoring appropriations for juvenile justice programs as well as ensuring appropriate implementation and oversight of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, and eliminating the Valid Court Order (VCO) exception.

# Sample Meeting Request

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Official Agency Letterhead (if applicable)

[Date]

ATTENTION: [scheduler name] «scheduler»  
The Honorable [Senator or Representative Name]  
United States [Senate or House of Representatives]  
[District Office Address]

VIA EMAIL: [email]

Dear [Senator or Representative]:

The purpose of this letter is to request an appointment for representatives of the [SAG or agency home] to meet with you in your district office on [date]. If it will not be possible to meet in person on [date] due to COVID-19, we would like to schedule a meeting via phone or video chat. If you are unavailable, we would like to meet with a key member of your staff who handles juvenile justice/children's services and appropriations issues.

As I believe you know, the [SAG or agency home] is a State agency with the primary mission of improving outcomes for children and families. We have previously provided you some of the publications we prepare that should be beneficial in addressing children's issues and identifying their impact on [your State], and as we usually do, we will share any new ones on this visit. Additionally, the [SAG or agency home] is responsible for implementation of the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) in [your State], which was passed in 2018.

[If you are a CJJ member-at-large please provide a short two to three sentence explanation of your interest in juvenile justice in lieu of the above paragraph.]

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you or a key member of your staff to discuss the implementation of the JJDP, appropriations for federal juvenile justice programs, and the impact the Act has had and continues to have in [your State]. [Name of contact] will call your office to follow up on scheduling an appointment. We look forward to seeing you on [Date]. If we can provide you with additional information or assistance, please contact me at [email and phone number].

Sincerely,

[name]

# Sample Thank You

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Official Agency Letterhead (if applicable)

[Date]

ATTENTION: [staff person]  
The Honorable [Senator or Representative Name]  
United States [Senate or House of Representatives]  
[District Office Address]

VIA EMAIL: [email]

Dear [Senator or Representative]:

We appreciate [you or name of staff] meeting with representatives of [SAG or other entity] on [date] to talk about federal juvenile justice funding and the implementation of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP). We were glad to have the opportunity to provide you with information about the positive impact these funds have had in [your state].

As we discussed during our conversation with [you or name of staff], we are particularly concerned about [enter information about federal funding for your state].

We hope the final budget will include strong allocations for juvenile justice and urge your support for these funds that make so much difference to communities across [your state] and the nation.

If we can provide you with additional information or assistance, please let us know. [State] critically needs federal juvenile justice funding.

Sincerely,

[name]



# Appendix

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## Picture Credit:

Cover (top): Pixabay

Cover (bottom): Pixabay

Page 2: Nikita Khandelwal

Page 3: Pixabay

Page 4: Canva

Page 6: Pascal Claivaz

Page 7: Skeeze

## Endnotes:

1. Juvenile Justice Federal Funding Chart. (2019). Act4JJ. Available at <http://www.act4jj.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/Historic%20Funding%20Chart%20-%20FY19.pdf>.
2. Juvenile Justice Federal Funding Chart. (2019). Act4JJ. Available at <http://www.act4jj.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/Historic%20Funding%20Chart%20-%20FY19.pdf>.
3. Justice Policy Institute. (Dec. 2014). Sticker Shock: Calculating the Full Price Tag for Youth Incarceration.
4. Development Services Group, Inc. 2017. "Juvenile Reentry." Literature review. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. <https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/Aftercare.pdf>
5. Supra note 1.



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