

IN-DISTRICT ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



Summer
2019



Introduction

In-District Advocacy is 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 fear, in fact, could not be further from the truth.

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 in-district is not only more feasible logistically for most advocates, but also provides valuable opportunities to build meaningful relationships with Members and their staff.

Members of Congress are also in-district quite frequently. This year in particular offers ample opportunity for in-district advocacy. There are district work periods built in throughout the Congressional calendar, and Members are usually in district between Friday and Monday every week. There are many opportunities to participate in federal advocacy and engage with Senators and Representatives right in your own backyard. This toolkit shows you how to do just that.



IN THIS TOOLKIT

IN DISTRICT ADVOCACY	PAGE 2
HOW TO ENGAGE IN DISTRICT	PAGE 3
DISTRICT MEETINGS	PAGE 4
TOWN HALL MEETINGS	PAGE 5
SITE AND PROGRAM VISITS	PAGE 6
OP-ED'S AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	PAGE 7
CJJ ADVOCACY PRIORITIES	PAGE 8
RESOURCES	PAGE 10
SAMPLE LETTERS	PAGE 11

Where to Begin?

This toolkit will be your guide. It will begin with the different ways you can engage with your Senator or Representative in-district followed by a step-by-step guide for how to meet with a Member of Congress, attend a town hall, plan a site visit, and write an editorial or letter to the editor. In this toolkit, you will find Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) advocacy priorities and briefing sheets to be used as leave-behinds for your Member. There are also helpful tips for effective advocacy throughout the toolkit.

We hope this toolkit provides a foundation for in-district federal advocacy and serves as a building block for strong and meaningful relationships with your Members of Congress.

In-District 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,

these moneys have, in some instances, been shifted to new programs. Federal funding will soon play 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 seventeen years, federal dollars have been cut drastically, down almost 50% since 2002.¹ States are struggling to hold the line and meet the requirements of the law. 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 at an event, 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 his or her staff will be happy to maintain a relationship with you.



How to Engage In-District

Opportunities to Interact with Members of Congress

District work periods and Friday-Monday are 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. Here are some examples:

- Schedule a meeting at the District Office;
- Attend a Town Hall meeting;
- Invite your Member for a site or program visit; or
- Write an editorial or letter to the editor.

2019 Dates to Remember

The following resources will help you prepare for your in-district outreach. Please keep the list of currently scheduled in-district work periods in mind as you plan your advocacy:

House of Representatives

July 1-5 & 29-31

August 1-31

September 3-6 & 30

October 1-11

November 4-8 & 25-29

Senate

July 1-5

August 5-31

September 1-6 & 30

October 1-14

November 25-29

December 16-31

In-District Meetings

Personal Visits With Your Member in the District

Members of Congress travel frequently between Washington, D.C. and their districts. Scheduling a meeting with them or one of their aides at the district office is 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. See how to get started below.

Make an Appointment

Contact the appointment scheduler in your district by fax 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 fax/email the district office, your request should be to the attention of the scheduler.

In your fax or email to the scheduler, you should include what you would like to speak to the Member about and identify yourself as a constituent and 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 be talking 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 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 #2

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. To find out more about how to meaningfully and respectfully share personal stories for advocacy go to: <http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/pbStrategicSharingGuide.pdf>. 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.

Sample Questions 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?
- The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act is one of the most successful standard setting federal statutes on the books. It creates a federal-state partnership for the administration of juvenile justice and provides core protections for youth in custody. Do you plan to support increased funding for Juvenile Justice (including restoring funds for Juvenile Accountability Block Grant)?

Advocacy Tip #3

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.

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 or fax 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 issues surrounding the young people in the program? These questions should be brainstormed and answered before reaching out to the Member's office.

If your Member is unable to visit your site or program, invite his or her District Office Director, Legislative Director, or most senior staff that works on juvenile justice issues to attend. Remember, strong relationships with your Member, always begin with your relationships with staff.



Advocacy Tip #4

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 implicate 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 #5

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 reauthorization 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. 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 hooks that will increase the likelihood of having your op-ed or letter to the editor published: (1) in this time of heightened interest in criminal justice reform, it is essential that we not overlook our children, and (2) as Congress determines their Fiscal Year 2020 appropriation levels, we should focus on investing in what works.

Take a look at local papers to see what types of issues are being talked about and see if you can link your piece to any of those topics.

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 paper 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

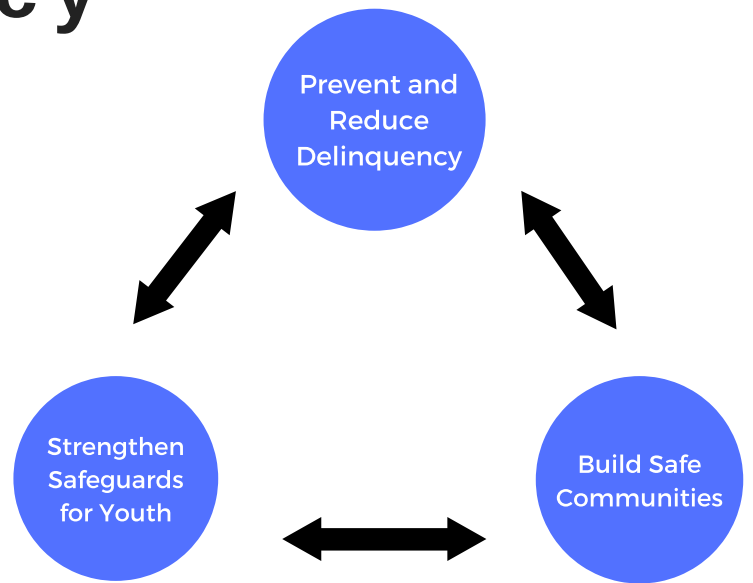
Four Core Requirements

1. Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO)
2. Adult Jail and Lock-up Removal (Jail Removal)
3. Sight and Sound Separation
4. Racial and Ethnic Disparities

Priority 1: Fully Implement the JJDPA

In the United States, there is no national, centralized juvenile justice system. Rather, there are more than 56 different juvenile justice systems independently operated by the U.S. states, territories, the District of Columbia, and local governments. Consequently, policies and procedures vary widely from state to state and among local jurisdictions, creating a patchwork quilt of juvenile justice systems and resulting in inconsistent outcomes for youth, families, and communities, including youth exposure to physical, mental and emotional injury. To address inconsistencies and to improve outcomes for youth and community safety, Congress passed the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) in 1974 thus changing the way in which states approach juvenile justice.

Most recently reauthorized in 2018 with bipartisan support, the JJDPA creates a federal-state partnership for the administration of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention.



The JJDPA also sets forth federal standards to ensure a minimum level of safety and equitable treatment for youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

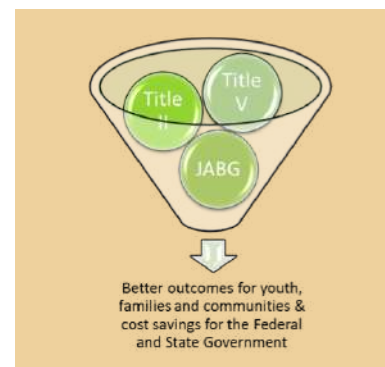
Now is the Time to Fully Implement

Advances in adolescent brain science demonstrate that children and youth are different from adults and that they should be held accountable in different ways. The U.S. Supreme Court has also affirmed the differences between youth and adults in recent decisions. The newly reauthorized JJDPA encourages states to invest in evidence- and research-based programs that have been proven effective.

Youth incarcerated in detention facilities are at serious risk of physical and emotional injury. Youth of color receive disparate treatment at every point along the juvenile justice continuum. Other special populations, such as LGBTQ youth and youth with mental health needs, are at risk of harm in the juvenile justice system. The JJDPA must be implemented to fully and correctly reflect contemporary needs and opportunities to assist youth.

Priority 2: Fully Fund the JJDP&A & 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:



1. Title II State Formula Grants
 - supports state efforts to comply with federal standards for the care of youth in the justice system, has been cut by more than 30%.
2. Title V Local Delinquency Prevention Program
 - 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-JJDP&A programs.
3. The Juvenile Accountability 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%.²

On average, it costs \$407.58 a day - around \$148,767 a year - to incarcerate a young person.³ The return on this investment is an average recidivism rate of 55%.⁴ 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.⁵

Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2020

Before October 1st, Congress must approve federal spending for discretionary programs, including juvenile justice funding for state programs. The House Appropriations Subcommittee passed H.R. 3055 for FY2020, which included a slight increase for juvenile justice programming. The House approved \$66 million for funding for Title II, \$64.5 million for Title V (which includes 31.5 available for the Youth PROMISE Program), \$100 million for mentoring, and \$10 million for JABG. Not only would this provide an increased amount of overall money for juvenile justice programming, but it would also be the first time that the JABG program would receive funding in five years.

It is essential that Members of Congress hear from you about the importance of maintaining and increasing federal funding for juvenile justice programs and services. Before a final budget is approved, advocates should ask Members to increase funding for juvenile justice and ensure that the JJDP&A is fully funded at its authorized level.

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.

- [Investing in What Works](#): This sheet outlines what the JJDPa is, and what the benefits of full implementation are.
- [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 now 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 since 2002, the last year in which the JJDPa was reauthorized.
- [Recommendations to the 116th Congress](#): This resource details the Coalition for Juvenile Justice's recommendations to the 116th Congress. These include:
 - restoring appropriations for juvenile justice programs; ensuring appropriate implementation and oversight of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act & eliminating the Valid Court Order (VCO) exception.

Sample Meeting Request

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 FAX or EMAIL: [fax or 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 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 bring you 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

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 FAX or EMAIL: [fax or 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 substantial amounts of 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

Picture Credit:

Cover (top): Pixabay

Cover (bottom): Pixabay

Page 2: Nikita Khandelwal

Page 3: Pixabay

Page 5: Pascal Claivaz

Page 6: 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 Snyder, Howard N. and Melissa Sickmund. 2006. Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

⁵ Supra note 1.



Coalition for Juvenile Justice
1319 F Street NW, Suite 402
Washington, DC 20004
P 202-467-0864
F 202-887-0738
E info@juvjustice.org
www.juvjustice.org