



IN-DISTRICT ADVOCACY PLANNING GUIDE

Engaging with House and Senate lawmakers while they are in their home district offices is a great opportunity to meet with them and raise awareness about pressing juvenile justice issues at both the national and state levels. It is also a chance to educate lawmakers on the critical role the **Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP)** plays in driving meaningful, community-based juvenile justice reform.

CJJ is happy to provide this in-district visit guide to make your in-district visits as efficient and effective as possible.

By showing up, we remind elected officials that youth justice is not an abstract policy issue, but something that impacts real lives. We pair compelling stories with data to paint a clear picture of what's working, what's not, and where federal leadership is needed most.

With these visits, we demonstrate to elected officials that the issues in the field of juvenile justice are urgent and actionable. We amplify our collective voice, build relationships with decision-makers, and keep juvenile justice on the national agenda.

COORDINATING A LEGISLATIVE MEETING

Logistics

1-3 Weeks prior to your visit, contact the Scheduler in each office you plan to visit (Click [here](#) to find your Senators and Congressional members.). If you don't get a response within a week, a polite reminder email may be needed. When setting a meeting, **the scheduler will need:**

- The date of your visit
- The times you are available
- Members of your contingent
- Where your contingent members reside
- Who you're representing (Your SAG and CJJ)
- What are the topics you'll be discussing (Juvenile Justice issues)
- Who is the contact person for your contingent (with phone number for day-of contact)

If the Senator or Congress member doesn't have availability that day, ask if a policy staffer is available instead. **Visits with staffers can be equally impactful.**

The day of your visit, bring enough copies of in-district materials for each person to have a copy.

PLEASE NOTE: This document and the "Legislative Talking Points" document are not included in leave-behind material. They serve as references for you and your group.



Group Preparation

Assign Responsibilities: Before your visits, designate a team leader and a note taker for each group. The team leader will guide the conversation and handle the "ask," while other delegates take on the role of sharing personal stories to highlight how the JJDPA impacts them.

Review CJJ's In-District Material: Before your visits, provide each delegation with a packet. Decide who on each team will cover which items in the packet. This will help your advocates stay focused on the key messages and keep the issues front and center for the legislators.

CJJ is here to help!

If you want help, advice, or have questions along the way, please contact:

Melissa Milchman, Executive Director at milchman@juvjustice.org or
Brock Landwehr, Associate Director at landwehr@juvjustice.org.

TALKING POINTS

FEEL FREE TO MODIFY AND SUPPLEMENT AS NEEDED.
THIS SHEET IS NOT PART OF THE LEAVE BEHIND MATERIAL.

INTRODUCTIONS

- Briefly introduce everyone in your group.
- Thank the Congressperson, Senator, or staff member for taking the time to meet with you.
- Describe your youth justice work (*what youth justice means to you and/or your community*).
- Describe the entity you are representing (*the CJJ, your SAG, and any other organizations*).



APPROPRIATIONS

1. Highlight return on investment

Federal funding has been instrumental in reducing youth delinquency and improving the effectiveness of our juvenile justice system in [your state]. For instance, [specific example of success, e.g., a program that saw measurable reductions in recidivism rates or improvements in community outcomes]

2. Explain how federal funds are utilized in your state

These federal investments are highly leveraged at the state, local, and tribal levels, and enabling progress that would otherwise be unattainable. [Provide relevant example, if possible.]

3. Stress the importance of continued federal investment

However, this progress is now at risk. In [your state], federal cuts have reduced funding by [state the overall amount; reference included state fact sheet]. As a result, [mention specific impacts, such as a program that could no longer be funded or how fewer children can be served due to the funding cut]

4. Describe the consequences of funding cuts

Significant cuts to non-defense discretionary programs, especially those impacting juvenile justice, would compromise oversight and accountability within youth justice systems. Furthermore, it would decrease access to effective, community-based interventions.

5. Ask for support

We need [Congressperson name] to champion sustained funding for juvenile justice programs. Can we count on [Congressperson name] to support continued investment in programs that work to keep our children and communities safe?

JJDPA IMPLEMENTATION

1. Highlight progress in your state

[Provide a specific example, such as a program that has successfully decreased detention rates for status offenders.]

2. Explain why federal support is crucial for full implementation of the JJDPA

The JJDPA was reauthorized in 2018 with BIPARTISAN support. The Act is in need of authorization again to maintain the excellent work happening at the state level while continuing to address areas in need of improvement. This includes:

- *Reducing the incarceration of youth who do not pose a threat to public safety.*
- *Addressing systematic disparities.*
- *Ensuring that non-delinquent youth are not incarcerated with those who have committed delinquent offenses.*

While the reauthorization sets the stage for continued momentum, recent cuts to our partners delivering critical training and technical assistance (such as CJJ) to [Your state], puts further strain on our ability to maintain our positive momentum in youth justice and JJDPA impact

3. Ask for support

To continue the progress we've made, we are asking [Congressperson name] to work with leaders in Congress to reauthorize the JJDPA, prioritize youth justice funding for 2026, and advocate for release of 2025 funding and reinstatement of funding to CJJ and our other training and technical assistance support necessary to maintain momentum. Can we count on [Congressperson name] to champion this cause?

CONCLUSION

- Give space for questions (*if there are questions you don't know the answer to, let them know you will get back to them as soon as possible, and let CJJ staff know how we can support you*).
- Thank the attendees for their time and consideration.

EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY VS. LOBBYING

EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY

Educating policymakers and attempting to bring about social change on behalf of a particular goal, program, interest, or population.

Examples:

- Sharing facts about juvenile justice trends
- Explaining how the JJDPJ works and its importance
- Providing research or case studies on the impact of juvenile justice programs on public safety and young people's overall well-being

LOBBYING

Trying to influence the voting and action of policymakers.

Examples:

- Asking a Congressperson to vote for or against a specific bill
- Providing proposed legislative language

State grantees are prohibited from lobbying with state resources. SAG members and DSA staff who participate in Hill Day should be intentional with their language, and avoid lobbying.

ARE YOU READY? VISIT PREP CHECKLIST



- ☐ Identify your members of Congress
- ☐ Research your members of Congress— learn their priorities
- ☐ Schedule your meeting
- ☐ Organize your team
- ☐ Prepare your message— decide which team member will cover which topics
- ☐ Bring your materials— Talking points, leave-behind material, a notebook for taking notes



LEAVE BEHIND MATERIAL

The following are intended to be left behind as reference material for Senators, Congressmen, and staffers.

1

Bring along copies of the State Fact Sheet ([linked here](#)) for your state. Bring at least one to leave behind at each office.

2

Bring along copies of the “Investing in What Works” sheet (below). Bring at least one to leave behind at each office.

3

Bring along copies of the funding chart ([linked here](#)). Bring at least one to leave behind at each office.

THE JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION ACT (JJDP)

INVESTING IN WHAT WORKS

WHAT IS THE JJDP?

Passed in 1974, the JJDP created a federal-state partnership for juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, ensuring that youth involved in the system receive federal standards of care. To be eligible for the funds provided under the JJDP, states must uphold the four core protections for justice-involved youth.

Four Core Protections of the JJDP

1. **Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO)** - Sect. 223(a)(11)(A) - not placing status offenders (truants, curfew violators, runaways, etc.), non-offenders, or unauthorized immigrants in secure detention.
2. **Removal of Juveniles from Adult Jails and Lockups** - Sect. 223(a)(13) - not detaining or confining juveniles in adult jails or lockups (subject to certain exceptions).
3. **Sight or Sound Separation of Juveniles from Adult Inmates** - Sect. 223(a)(12) - not detaining or confining juveniles in any institution in which they have sight or sound contact with adult inmates.
4. **Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities (R/ED)** - Sect. 223(a)(15) - identifying and reducing racial and ethnic disparities among youth who come into contact with the justice system.

The JJDP also includes provisions for Removing Juveniles Charged as Adults - Sect. 223(a)(11)(B) - meaning that juveniles charged as adults should not be detained or confined in jails or lockups unless the court makes certain findings allowing it.

Additionally, the JJDP established the **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)**, the only federal agency dedicated to supporting states' juvenile justice work. OJJDP plays a vital role in ensuring youth are treated differently than adults.

The JJDP, reauthorized in 2018 with unanimous bipartisan support, requires adequate funding and oversight to ensure its full implementation. **The Act is now due for reauthorization**, and continued federal commitment is more critical now than ever.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE JJDP?

Keep communities safe by incentivizing states' investment in evidence-based programs that promote accountability and reduce delinquency

Sets federal standards to protect the rights of youth in the justice system

Focuses on rehabilitating youth and reintegrating them into society

Provides federal funding to support state / local youth justice improvements with input from State Advisory Groups

Ensures fair treatment by guiding states to implement data-driven, just approaches

Requires accountability and oversight in resource use and grant program compliance