



NLADA District Week Toolkit

The August congressional recess is one of the most effective times to engage Members of Congress because they are spending more time in their home states and districts. District offices often have greater influence during recess, since they coordinate local events, constituent meetings, and community outreach.

NLADA's District Week, August 24-28, provides an opportunity for the equal justice community to tell Congress about the importance of low-income legal services and the federally funded programs that clients of those services rely on every day.

This guide will cover the following steps to engaging with your congressional offices:

- 1. Find your Members of Congress**
- 2. Schedule an in-district meeting**
 - Phone/email meeting request script/template
 - Drop-in meeting request script
 - What to expect in a meeting
 - NLADA's Key Talking Points
 - Talking points for liberals/more supportive congressional offices
 - Talking points for moderate/conservative/less supportive congressional offices
 - Cheat Sheet: State data on use of and need for select federally funded programs
 - Tips to follow
 - Pitfalls to avoid
- 3. Attend town halls and public events**
- 4. Invite the Member to visit your organization/community**
- 5. Follow up**
- 6. Increase visibility**

If you have questions about this guide or District week, contact Michael Mrozinski at m.mrozinski@nlada.org.

1. Find Your Members of Congress

Depending on where you live, you are represented by either one or three Members of Congress:

- If you live in one of the 50 states, you are represented by three Members of Congress: two Senators for your state and one Representative for your congressional district.
- If you live in American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, or the U.S. Virgin Islands, you are represented by a non-voting Delegate in the House of Representatives.
- If you live on Puerto Rico, you are represented by a non-voting Resident Commissioner in the House of Representatives.

To find your Member(s) of Congress and their district offices closest to you, visit <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>. Note that every Member of Congress has an office at the U.S. Capitol complex in Washington, DC in addition to one or more district offices in the areas they represent – while Congress is in recess, contact the district office closest to you. Senators typically have multiple offices throughout the state they represent, and members of the House have at least one office in their home district.

2. Schedule an In-District Meeting

Once you have identified who represents you in Congress, call or email their district office(s) closest to you and request a meeting with the Representative/Senator. If the Member of Congress is unavailable, ask for a meeting with the District Director or district staff, who regularly brief the Member on constituent priorities. You can also go to the district office and ask for a meeting without calling ahead, but this approach is less likely to result in an effective meeting.

Phone/Email Meeting Request Script/Template

When contacting your Member(s) of Congress, you can request a meeting by phone or email using the script/template below, personalized to your request. There is no need to use these exact words and phrasings – feel free to make it your own!

Hello, my name is [Your Name], and I am a constituent of [Representative/Senator Name]. I serve as [Your Title] at [Organization Name], which provides legal services to constituents across [city/county/state].

During the August congressional recess, I am reaching out as part of the National Legal Aid & Defender Association's District Week education efforts to request a meeting with the [Representative/Senator] or the appropriate district staff member.

We would like to discuss the importance of protecting and strengthening federal funding for civil legal aid and the essential federal programs our clients rely on, including health care, housing, education, and other public benefits. These investments help ensure families can access critical services, resolve legal issues before they become crises, and strengthen communities.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet during the August recess at your district office or another convenient location. Please let me know if there is availability in the coming weeks.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Drop-In Meeting Request Script

If you decide to visit a congressional district office without calling or emailing ahead of time, you can greet the front desk staff and request a meeting using the script below. As before, feel free to adapt the language to your situation!

Hello, my name is [Your Name], and I'm a constituent of [Representative/Senator Name]. I'm here as part of the National Legal Aid & Defender Association's District Week to talk about the importance of federally funded programs like healthcare, housing, and legal aid. Is there someone I can talk with about these issues?

If no one is available to speak with you for a drop-in meeting, ask if you can schedule a meeting with the Representative/Senator, their District Director, or district staff who handles issues related to health, housing, education, or the judiciary. Be sure to request their business card for follow-up.

What to Expect in a Meeting

It is unlikely you will get a meeting with the Senator/Representative; it is more likely you will be offered a meeting with the District Director or another member of the district staff.

If you can get a sit-down meeting, it will likely last 15-20 minutes. The staffer who meets with you may only have availability for a short, 5-minute talk by the office's front desk. It's important to use that time efficiently to share information about the impact of federal

funding cuts and the value of government-funded services under threat for the Senator's/Representative's constituents.

Come to your meeting prepared to:

- Share stories about the importance of your office/organization for the success and wellbeing of your community;
- Share stories about how federal funding for legal services and public programs helps your office/clients/community, using examples drawn from your experience (without naming or otherwise identifying particular clients); and
- Leave behind a concise one-pager or fact sheet about your office/program exhibiting community impact/mission.

When you enter the office, greet the Staff Assistant(s) at the front desk:

Hello, my name is [your name], and I am a constituent of [Representative/Senator] [legislator's name]. I am the [your title/role] at [your organization name], which serves the member's constituents throughout [the state/county/city jurisdiction(s) served by your organization]. I'm here as part of the National Legal Aid & Defender Association's District Week and I'd like to speak with the [Representative/Senator], the District Director, or an appropriate staff member about the importance of federal funding for legal services and essential programs that our clients and communities rely on, including healthcare, housing, and education.

For the flow of your meeting, consider planning out your time, whether it be 15 minutes or just 5 minutes, using the example runs-of-show below:

Example Run-of-Show for a 15-Minute Sit-Down Meeting

1. Introductions (2 minutes)
2. Framing (3 minutes): Explain the issue you're discussing and why it's important to the Member of Congress and/or their constituents.
3. Share your experience (5 minutes): What have you seen? If you're a legal services provider, what situations have your clients been in?
4. Questions from the congressional staff (4 minutes)
5. Thank-you, ask for a photo with the staffer you met with, and ask for their business card (1 minute)

Example Run-of-Show for a Brief 5-Minute Meeting

1. Introductions (1 minute)
2. Framing (2 minutes): Explain the issue you're discussing and why it's important to the Member of Congress and/or their constituents.
3. Share your experience (2 minutes): What have you seen? If you're a legal services provider, what situations have your clients been in?
4. Thank-you, as for a photo with the staffer you met with, and ask for their business card (<1 minute)

NLADA's Key Talking Points

The most impactful way of communicating your points in the meeting depends in part on how supportive the office/Member of Congress is to supporting federal funding for services that low-income communities depend on. That could track with the Member's party (Democrat, Independent, Republican), but not necessarily. With this in mind, and considering that you will need to share your experiences and perspectives quickly and concisely during the meeting, NLADA has provided some recommended talking points below for liberal/more supportive offices and for moderate/conservative/less supportive offices.

In addition, consider referring to the state data on use of and need for federally funded programs, listed after the talking points below.

Please note that LSC grantees and others who are restricted from lobbying should not make concrete policy asks in their meetings, but can instead limit their remarks to educating Members of Congress and their staff on the importance of low-income legal services and the federally funded programs that their clients use.

Talking Points for Liberal/More Supportive Congressional Offices

- **Housing is the bedrock of stable communities:**
 - Affordable and reliable housing is critical to safety and stability.
 - Government investment in ending homelessness and ensuring housing is crucial to safe communities.
 - The proven Housing First model recognizes housing as crucial for safe, thriving communities.
 - If someone does not have stable housing, then work, school, health, and safety become uncertain, increasing the likelihood of civil and criminal legal issues.

- Legal aid lawyers and public defenders fight evictions and convictions to keep families in their homes.
- **Healthcare programs and public benefits are critical to day-to-day and week-to-week survival for many clients of legal aid and public defense:**
 - Medicaid, food assistance, and disability insurance are central to the livelihoods of millions of Americans.
 - Medicaid helps millions of individuals and children stay healthy.
 - Disability insurance and food assistance also ensure people can afford basic necessities to live healthy lives.
 - When people must choose between paying for food or health care, the very fibers that hold our communities together are undermined:
 - Other basic costs like rent and clothing cannot be met
 - People lose their homes
 - Children drop out of school
 - People turn to predatory loans that drive them deeper into debt and enter a devastating cycle of civil and criminal legal issues.
 - Civil legal aid attorneys help individuals secure and retain these crucial benefits, and address related issues, including evictions and consumer debt.
- **Education is the foundation of a stable democracy:**
 - Countless experts say that education improves long-term stability and opportunity
 - Federal funding supports education programs that ensure every child has a fair chance to thrive in school.
 - It also supports the legal assistance students require to protect their rights.
 - Civil legal aid attorneys and public defenders support students facing barriers such as access to:
 - Individualized education plans that ensure support for learning disabilities and address causes of disciplinary issues.
 - Barriers to attendance that result in truancy.
 - Disability discrimination, or denial of services.
 - Education keeps children out of the court system: Youth defenders are essential to ensuring children aren't imprisoned when there are alternatives to addressing problematic.
- **Federally funded programs keep people out of the legal system:**
 - Millions of Americans rely on legal aid to stay housed, employed, safe, and healthy.

- The overwhelming majority of clients served by civil legal aid and public defenders rely on federally funded programs, such as Medicaid, public benefits, housing, and educational resources.
- Civil legal aid and public defense attorneys educate communities, advocate for stronger policies, and represent those who cannot afford legal counsel.
- Resources and funding for civil legal aid and public defense systems leads to better outcomes for individuals, communities, and legal systems nationwide.
- Changes to Medicaid, SNAP, Disability Insurance, Education Support, Housing support, and other essential programs will affect millions of people, and increase their need for legal assistance, but our legal advocates do not have the resources to help resolve these issues
 - As a result, our communities will be destabilized, and millions of lives will be devastated.
- Legal aid and public defense are vastly underfunded even in the face of current need.
 - Legal aid is unable to serve more than half of the people who seek their help.
 - Over 90% of people accused of crimes need a public defender to protect their rights and freedom.
- It is critical that these investments are sustained to strengthen communities to promote equal access to justice and the federally funded program that clients rely on. We thank you for your partnership and your continued commitment to advancing equal justice for all.

Talking Points for Moderate/Conservative/Less Supportive Congressional Offices

- Stable communities, economic mobility, and public safety are shared priorities across party lines. Strategic federal investments in housing, healthcare, education, and access to justice are proven to strengthen families, reduce government costs over time, and ensure the effective functioning of our legal system.
- **Housing Stability Supports Strong Communities and Reduces Costs**
 - Safe, stable housing is foundational to strong communities. When individuals and families have reliable housing, they are more likely to remain employed, keep children in school, and avoid costly interactions with emergency and legal systems. Conversely, housing instability increases demand on emergency services and social services. Targeted housing

investments are a cost-effective way to prevent crises rather than respond to them after the fact.

- **Healthcare and Basic Supports Keep Americans Working**

- Access to healthcare and basic needs programs helps individuals remain healthy, productive, and self-sufficient. When families are forced to choose between food, medical care, and housing, the downstream effects often include job loss, financial instability, and increased reliance on emergency systems. Maintaining access to essential supports helps stabilize the workforce, reduce uncompensated care costs, and promote long-term economic participation.

- **Education Strengthens the Workforce and Reduces System Involvement**

- Education is central to workforce development and long-term economic growth. Federal support helps ensure that all students—including those facing disabilities or other barriers—have a greater opportunity to succeed. Early support reduces absenteeism, improves outcomes, and decreases the likelihood of later involvement in the justice system. Investing in education is both a workforce strategy and a prevention strategy.

- **Access to Justice Ensures Accountability and System Efficiency**

- Equal access to justice is a cornerstone of our legal system. In criminal matters, the right to counsel is a constitutional obligation, essential to ensuring fair and efficient proceedings. In civil matters, legal assistance helps individuals resolve issues before they escalate into more costly disputes.
- Funding for effective public defense is required to deliver on the constitutional guarantee of the Sixth Amendment right to counsel. Sixth Amendment rights are essential to ensuring fair trials and to check against government overreach in criminal cases.
- When legal systems are under-resourced, courts face delays, cases take longer to resolve, and costs increase for all parties—including taxpayers. Adequate support for legal services and public defense promotes efficiency, reduces backlog, and upholds constitutional standards.

- **Preventing a Costly Cascade Effect**

- When community standards and systems are inconsistently supported, the consequences compound:
 - Increased strain on courts, law enforcement, and public systems
 - Higher long-term costs driven by crisis response rather than prevention
 - Reduced compliance with community standards and legal obligations

- Greater instability for families and local economies
- By contrast, consistent and coordinated investment reinforces accountability, promotes compliance, and reduces avoidable system burdens.
- Federal budget cuts have passed responsibility for essential programs onto the states, which in turn have been forced into reducing or cutting services, all meaning that everyday people are no longer getting the help they need.
- **A Responsible Path Forward**
 - Federal funding decisions should reflect a commitment to both fiscal responsibility and effective governance. Investments that prevent crises, support working families, and ensure the integrity of our legal system deliver measurable returns—reducing long-term costs while strengthening communities. This is not a partisan issue. It is a practical one.
 - A strong, stable nation depends on policies that work—supporting families, safeguarding constitutional rights, and ensuring that public systems operate efficiently and effectively.
- **The [Representative's/Senator's] constituents depend on federally funded programs every day.**
 - Funding for civil legal aid and public defense gives rural families, veterans, survivors of domestic violence, and low-income communities a fighting chance to protect their rights in court.
 - Federal programs work best when people can successfully access and navigate them. Millions of Americans rely on federally funded programs for healthcare, food assistance, veterans' benefits, disability benefits, housing assistance, and education. Legal aid helps eligible individuals understand program requirements, resolve disputes, and avoid unnecessary administrative costs.
 - Recent policy changes are increasing demand for legal assistance. As eligibility rules and program requirements become more complex, more Americans including seniors, veterans, working families, and people with disabilities that need legal help to understand their rights and responsibilities.
 - Public defense protects constitutional rights and promotes efficient courts. Upwards of 90% of individuals charged with crimes rely on a public defender. Adequately funded defense systems help courts operate more efficiently, reduce unnecessary delays, and uphold the constitutional right to counsel.
- **Congress's investments in low-income legal services and in healthcare, housing, and education programs are an efficient use of taxpayer dollars.**

- Funding for housing assistance, healthcare, food assistance, and legal services is less expensive and provides greater return on investment than cutting these programs and funneling people into emergency services for help.
- Civil legal aid also produces efficient economic returns on investment. Studies conducted in multiple states have found that investments in legal aid generate significant economic benefits through reduced reliance on emergency services, prevention of homelessness, preservation of federal benefits flowing into local economies, and reduced burdens on courts and social service systems.
- Supporting legal aid is a bipartisan investment in justice, accountability, and efficient government. Ensuring access to legal assistance helps communities remain stable, protects taxpayer investments in federal programs, and strengthens confidence in the rule of law.
- We ask for support in robust funding for federal programs that support the communities served by civil legal aid and public defense. Investing in these programs as well as low-income legal services is a fiscally responsible way to reduce costs, strengthen communities, improve government efficiency, and ensure Americans can access the legal help they need when facing legal problems.

Cheat Sheet: State Data on Use of and Need for Select Federally Funded Programs

	Total Medicaid Recipients	% of Population Covered by Medicaid	Average SNAP monthly Recipients	% of Population Receiving SNAP	Homelessness (per 10K)	People Experiencing Homelessness on a given night
Alabama	1,097,000	21.4%	752,161	14.7%	6	3,304
Alaska	236,000	32.0%	68,261	9.3%	36	2,614
Arizona	2,156,000	28.9%	923,400	12.4%	19	14,237
Arkansas	813,000	26.5%	240,122	7.8%	9	2,609
California	14,478,000	36.9%	5,379,575	13.7%	47	181,399
Colorado	1,143,000	19.4%	584,470	9.9%	25	14,439
Connecticut	1,086,000	29.8%	391,204	10.7%	8	3,015
Delaware	237,000	22.9%	117,676	11.4%	12	1,245
Florida	4,343,000	19.0%	2,975,789	13.0%	14	30,756
Georgia	2,240,000	20.2%	1,411,357	12.8%	11	12,294
Hawaii	441,000	30.6%	161,609	11.2%	43	6,223
Idaho	355,000	18.0%	130,853	6.6%	12	2,298

Illinois	2,942,000	23.3%	1,935,645	15.3%	10	11,947
Indiana	1,833,000	26.6%	610,689	8.9%	9	6,017
Iowa	603,000	18.7%	259,323	8.1%	8	2,653
Kansas	358,000	12.1%	187,043	6.3%	9	2,636
Kentucky	1,395,000	30.7%	595,220	13.1%	11	4,766
Louisiana	1,856,000	40.5%	847,133	18.5%	7	3,169
Maine	396,000	28.3%	172,232	12.3%	31	4,258
Maryland	1,469,000	23.6%	693,496	11.2%	9	5,865
Massachusetts	1,989,000	28.1%	1,113,678	15.8%	27	19,141
Michigan	2,387,000	23.7%	1,474,427	14.6%	9	8,997
Minnesota	1,171,000	20.4%	453,860	7.9%	15	8,393
Mississippi	667,000	22.7%	384,805	13.1%	3	982
Missouri	1,223,000	19.7%	656,621	10.6%	11	6,708
Montana	218,000	19.3%	81,495	7.2%	19	2,178
Nebraska	346,000	17.4%	155,034	7.8%	12	2,462
Nevada	738,000	23.0%	505,462	15.7%	27	8,666
New Hampshire	181,000	12.9%	76,909	5.5%	17	2,441
New Jersey	1,722,000	18.4%	827,227	8.8%	11	10,264
New Mexico	878,000	41.4%	451,243	21.3%	18	3,842
New York	6,986,000	35.4%	2,926,213	14.8%	53	103,200
North Carolina	3,012,000	27.7%	1,415,607	13.0%	9	9,754
North Dakota	105,000	13.3%	48,694	6.2%	10	784
Ohio	3,081,000	26.1%	1,386,865	11.7%	10	11,386
Oklahoma	984,000	24.2%	686,808	16.9%	11	4,648
Oregon	1,268,000	29.8%	757,744	17.8%	48	20,142
Pennsylvania	2,986,000	22.9%	2,000,018	15.4%	10	12,556
Rhode Island	309,000	28.0%	144,295	13.1%	17	1,810
South Carolina	1,310,000	24.3%	581,593	10.8%	8	4,053
South Dakota	125,000	13.6%	75,082	8.2%	14	1,282
Tennessee	1,524,000	21.3%	711,178	9.9%	13	9,215
Texas	4,420,000	14.4%	3,193,009	10.4%	9	27,377
Utah	337,000	9.8%	169,281	4.9%	11	3,687
Vermont	168,000	25.9%	66,493	10.3%	51	3,295
Virginia	1,520,000	17.4%	827,774	9.5%	8	6,761
Washington	1,860,000	23.7%	888,316	11.3%	36	28,036
West Virginia	522,000	29.5%	277,429	15.7%	8	1,416
Wisconsin	1,278,000	21.5%	705,421	11.9%	8	4,861
Wyoming	71,000	12.1%	29,031	5.0%	9	532

District of Columbia	257,000	37.4%	137,452	20.0%	72	4,922
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Tips to Follow

- It's okay to repeat yourself! Congressional offices hear a lot of information and requests, and it won't hurt for you to repeat yourself.
- You don't have to memorize the talking points – it's a lot of information! Review them ahead of time to understand generally how these programs affect legal services and their clients.
- It's okay to refer to your notes! Both this briefing packet (the previous two pages) and the hand-outs have a summary of why federally funded programs are important.
- If you are asked a question that you don't have the answer to, or if you're asked to provide research or other resources to back up what you're saying, it's okay to say that you or NLADA will follow up with the legislator's office to provide that information.
- Make sure you get a business card from everyone you meet with.
- On your way out of each office, get a photo with who you met with and snap a selfie by the office sign. We'd love to share these photos to show our community the outstanding work you're doing!

Pitfalls to Avoid

- Focus on educating the staff member without making a specific request or call to action.
- When talking about the funding cuts or the affected programs, don't assign blame or credit to Republicans, Democrats, conservatives, or liberals. Calling out specific political blocs undermines the bipartisan, universal appeal of our issues and our efforts.

3. Attend Town Halls and Public Events

Particularly during recesses, many Members of Congress host town halls, community roundtables, coffee with constituents, and other events where constituents can provide feedback to their Representatives and Senators. These are also good opportunities to stand up for low-income legal services and the federally funded programs that clients of legal aid and public defense rely on.

- To find town halls and public events: Check out official accounts and websites run by the elected officials and their staff, including:
- Facebook;
- Official government websites, specifically sections on Press Releases, Events, and Media Alerts;
- Official government newsletters (a sign-up page is typically found on their websites).

Additionally, you can call or email your local district offices to see if they have events on the calendar. Check out <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>.

4. Invite the Member to Visit Your Organization or Community

A great way to demonstrate your advocacy is to let your Members of Congress see the work you do firsthand by inviting them to visit your organization's offices or field operations or tour your community. Offer to host a site visit at a:

- Civil legal aid office;
- Public defender office;
- Community partner organization;
- Medical-legal partnership program; and/or
- Veterans or housing assistance program.

5. Follow Up

After your visit, it is appropriate and encouraged to follow up with the district office and the staffer(s) you met with to express your gratitude and your availability as a resource on these issues going forward. Consider these steps:

- Send a thank-you email. Within 24 to 48 hours, thank the Member of Congress or staff for meeting with you. Briefly discuss your key request and offer any additional resources promised during the meeting.
- Be sure to collect business cards or contact information from everyone you meet with so you can follow up.
- Document the office's position, questions raised, requested follow-up items, and any further action steps.

- Continue engaging with the office by sharing relevant updates, inviting them to local events or site visits, and thanking them when they take supportive actions. If on social media, share and tag the Member thanking them and their staff for meeting.

6. Increase Visibility

Finally, sharing your district office visit with your local community and the broader equal justice community nationally is a great way to let people know about your legislative engagement. Consider writing an op-ed or letter to editor in your local newspaper, publishing a press release if the Member of Congress visits your organization, or sharing photos and key takeaways on social media and tagging the Member as well.

Finally, **please share any photos from your District Week visits with NLADA by emailing Michael Mrozinski at m.mrozinski@nlada.org**. We would love to share your efforts with our community!

Good luck, and thank you for your support!