In-District Meetings with Members of Congress

What are in-district meetings?

Every August, members of Congress head back to their districts for summer recess. They spend the next few weeks working from their home states and meeting with constituents.

While in Washington D.C., members of Congress are typically focused on specific legislation, committee hearings, and votes. During summer recess, however, their focus shifts to constituents and “on the ground” matters in their states. They will generally have more availability to meet with you and will be more focused on touching base with constituents. Summer recess is a perfect opportunity to schedule a meeting with your member of Congress or their staff to talk about important animal protection issues.

Normally, in-district meetings offer a unique opportunity to sit down with members of Congress and staff, and talk face-to-face – something that can be a challenge to do the rest of the year when Congress is in session in Washington D.C. This year, the Animal Legal Defense Fund recommends scheduling virtual in-district meetings due to COVID-19. Virtual meetings offer the same opportunity to connect with members of Congress and their staff during this “off season” period, while ensuring everyone stays safe.

How to set up a meeting with your member of Congress or their staff

Here are a few steps to help you get started:

1. Not sure who your members of Congress are? Find out here. Once you click on the link, enter your address under “find your member by address” and you’ll be able to view your U.S. senators and representative.
2. Once you’ve located your members of Congress, click on a member’s name to be directed to their individual webpage, where you’ll be able to find a list of in-district office locations, phone numbers, and emails so that you can reach out. Using the Animal Legal Defense Fund office location as an example, we’ve identified members of Congress below.

3. If you click on Senator Feinstein, you’ll get directed to the following webpage:

4. You now have several options to find the contact information for Senator Feinstein’s in-district offices. You can either click on any one of the “office locations” to get a relevant address, phone number, and email, or click “Email Dianne” which will also direct you to the same information. Each member of Congress will have a slightly different website, but the same information should be available under a constituent resources section regardless of the formatting.
5. You can either call or email an in-district office to set up a meeting. It’s possible your member of Congress may not be available, and a staff member will be willing to meet with you instead. It is absolutely worth your time to meet with congressional staff; they often have significant influence with inter-office decisions and can help immensely with bringing animal issues to a member’s attention.

How to prepare for an in-district meeting

Whether a meeting is in-person or virtual, it’s important to familiarize yourself with the issues you’ll be speaking about beforehand. There are plenty of resources on the Animal Legal Defense Fund website to help you prepare. It’s also beneficial to familiarize yourself with the member of Congress you’ll be meeting with. Have they introduced animal protection bills, or supported animal protection initiatives? If so, be sure to make a note to thank them during the meeting. Have they opposed animal protection initiatives? If so, think about how you may be able to find common ground.

During the meeting

Whether you’re meeting with a member of Congress or their staff, here are a few tips to keep in mind during the meeting:

- Always be respectful and professional: regardless of whether your member of Congress is a champion on animal protection issues or an opponent to animal protection issues, it is always important to be respectful and professional. While they may be opposed to one animal protection issue, it’s possible a different one might resonate, so focusing on finding common ground and maintaining a professional demeanor is important. It will also make congressional staff more willing to meet with you again in the future.

- Be cognizant of the member’s (or staff member’s) time: even when they’re in-district, members of Congress and their staff are incredibly busy. It is perfectly normal and reasonable for them to allocate only 15-30 minutes of time for a constituent meeting. This will give you a chance to have a brief, but meaningful conversation, that can always be continued at another time. They will greatly appreciate you being respectful of their time and making a point to conclude the meeting at the designated end time.

- Be sure to make an ask: While it’s beneficial to educate your member of Congress or their staff about animal protection issues, it’s also great to ask them to cosponsor or vote for legislation. They expect this and are especially receptive to these asks when they’re made by constituents. By doing so, you’ll help build momentum for important legislation.

After the meeting

Be sure to send a follow up email to your member of Congress or the staff member you spoke with thanking them for taking the time to meet with you. This will help build your
relationship with that office and will make members and staff more likely to remember you when you contact them again in the future.