

**END  
SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE**

National Alliance to  
End Sexual Violence

# ADVOCATING FOR SURVIVOR SERVICES & PREVENTION WITH CONGRESS: A TOOLKIT



**2024**

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# ADVOCACY 101

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It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the legislative process, which can be both complex and impersonal. Most people do not know who their elected representatives are and have not engaged in direct advocacy of any kind, let alone federal advocacy directed at their senators and representatives in Congress. However, as a constituent and a voter, your voice is important and powerful at all levels of government.

The first job of an elected official is to get elected, and starting their first day in office, they begin thinking about how to meet their constituents' needs in order to keep their job. This is one of the many reasons why members of Congress are very responsive to learning about the policy-related priorities of individuals who live in their district. While they may not always agree with a constituent's point of view, the information and data shared by the people they represent is very important for them to know.

**The voice of a constituent, and even better, an organized group of constituents, is very powerful.**

# WHAT CONSTITUTES EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY?

Engaging with members of Congress and their staff allows you to influence the development and implementation of effective public policy.

As a direct service provider or someone working in the field, you have community specific expertise to bring to bear on policy decisions.

Advocacy and storytelling encourage movement beyond a “one-size-fits-all” approach to developing policy solutions and help members take into account the unique needs in their own state and communities.

# WHY ENGAGE IN ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is not a one-time activity; ideally you want to establish yourself and your organization as a resource to members of Congress and their staff for timely and accurate information.

It is about building a trusted relationship with elected officials, administrators, and their staff over time.

Effective advocacy is rooted in mutual respect and trust. Even if you and a member disagree, you want them to trust your facts and your sources; ultimately this is the best foundation for educating and persuading policymakers.



# MEETINGS

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**A lot has changed about how we do our work.** Local programs have had to make profound adjustments to service structures, and advocates have had to change many of their services and networking to virtual platforms. Many of us have now grown accustomed handling much of our work online. That holds true for members of Congress and their staff too.

Virtual meetings are still popular both in terms of public health and convenience. However, it is reasonable to consider requesting an in-person meeting. Feel free to consider your preferences and well as those of your members of Congress and their staff. If you choose to prepare or meet in person, proper CDC guidelines about masks, social distancing, and quarantines following exposure should be followed.



# REQUESTING YOUR MEETING



To meet with your representative or senator during an in-district work period (when they are at home and not in D.C.), initiate your request through the scheduler in the district office where you would like to meet.

**You can find their website information at [senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov) or [house.gov](https://www.house.gov)**

Each member's website will list their office locations including their D.C. office and their district or state offices; these can typically be found at the bottom of their website or under "Contact" information. Most representatives and senators have two or more offices in the state or district; you can visit the location that is most convenient to you.

To identify the scheduler, call the district office and ask who you should direct your request to and how they prefer receiving meeting requests (email, fax, phone request, or online forms are all options used by congressional offices). We have provided you with a template email request which you can customize as appropriate.

Within three to five days of initiating your request, call the district scheduler to confirm that it was received; offices receive numerous requests and it is easy for an email to be overlooked. Following up is key to securing a meeting.

For member-level meetings, initiate your request as soon as possible; a member's days are often scheduled weeks in advance. Some offices may ask that you coordinate with their D.C.-based scheduler and will connect you with that office. Scheduling a meeting can be a bureaucratic process; allow sufficient time for the scheduler to process your request.

If the member is unavailable, the scheduler will likely connect you with a staffer who handles issues related to sexual violence; it is perfectly acceptable to meet with staff. If the scheduler does not offer an alternative contact and you do not know the staffer who handles these issues, you can call the district office and ask who they recommend. It is often easier to get on a staffer's calendar and in most cases, they schedule their own meetings.

# PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETING

One of the most important things you can do to prepare for advocacy meetings is to know who you are meeting with and where that member of Congress stands on the issues important to you and your organization. The House and Senate websites can help you identify your member of Congress (House.gov) and senators (Senate.gov).

Another critical element in successful advocacy is to keep your message consistent with your organization's policy priorities. In preparation for your in-district meetings, The National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (NAESV) has provided policy one-pagers and key talking points that offer guidance on how to talk about key policy issues. Get to know the priorities well before your advocacy

# STANDARD THINGS TO EXPECT

Even if you are scheduled to meet with the member, you might end up meeting with staff instead because of unforeseen schedule changes. Similarly, you may end up meeting with a different staffer than expected.

A meeting with the member or a staffer could be very brief and last less than 15 minutes depending on their schedule, how familiar they are with your organization, and how aligned they are with your policies and your ask.

Staff that you meet with may be young and early in their career. That does not mean they aren't knowledgeable or that they are the wrong person to be meeting with.



# IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

## **BE ON TIME.**

## **DRESS APPROPRIATELY.**

Usually that means business or business casual attire even if the meeting is virtual. For online meetings, give thought to a neutral background and quiet space.

## **MAKE INTRODUCTIONS.**

Be sure everyone in your group is introduced and knows which issues they will cover in the meeting. Always start on a positive note.

## **ASSIGN ROLES.**

Once you know who is participating in your meeting, determine each participant's role including who will speak about which issue and when.

**Get to know  
the priorities well  
before your  
advocacy meetings  
and practice the  
talking points.**

## **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.**

What committees does the member serve on? If you are meeting with a staffer, what is their policy portfolio (i.e. what issues do they cover for their boss)? Check recent news coverage of the member and read up on their website.

## **INVITE LEADERS.**

In addition to rape crisis center leadership and staff, consider inviting a survivor activist, a well-connected board member, and/or a community leader who has benefited from your prevention programs to join you to further reflect your important work.

## **ASSIGN A MODERATOR.**

Designate a team lead who can introduce the group and frame the purpose of your meeting.

## **STAY INFORMED.**

Be aware of high-profile cases or other issues in the news and how, if at all, you want to address or respond to those.

## **ASSIGN A NOTE TAKER.**

Identify in advance who is taking notes including the tenor of the meeting, any questions asked by the member or their staff, and any meeting follow-up.

## **DEVELOP OBJECTIVES.**

Prepare your talking points and your "ask."

## **SAY THANK YOU.**

Find something to thank the office for.

## **DON'T DO ALL THE TALKING.**



# IT IS VERY COMMON TO MEET WITH A MEMBER'S STAFF AND NOT WITH THE MEMBER DIRECTLY.

Staff exercise significant influence on how a member will vote and are often responsible for understanding policy and legislative details; do not view a meeting with a staff as a waste of time. Often these are the people who inform their bosses' understanding of an issue and how they ultimately will vote.

This opening actually provides an opportunity for you to follow up with the office. Remember that advocacy is about a relationship. You want the official and staff to trust you and see you as a credible resource. If you give incorrect information, you will severely undermine your credibility; instead, offer to try to find the information as part of your meeting follow-up.



If you are asked a question you do not know the answer to, it is okay to tell the staffer you do not know.

Do NOT make something up, guess, or hedge.

# CONDUCTING YOUR MEETING

## DO:

- Be concise and ready with key points and plan on meeting for no more than 25 minutes; most members and their staff are scheduled every half hour.
- Leave time for the official to respond and to ask you questions.
- Know the bill number and name if you are talking about specific legislation. Do not expect that the member or their staff will necessarily be familiar with the legislation.
- Speak from your area of expertise and share personal stories. Storytelling puts real-life faces with facts and data.
- Find out where the official stands on the issue.
- Ask specific questions and try to get specific commitments.
- Be sure to mention if you are a constituent.
- Be passionate, but make sure to stay calm and in control of your words, body language, and emotions.
- Make sure to include specific “asks” unless you’re having a meeting to simply educate the member.

## DO NOT:

- Issue explicit or veiled threats or bring “politics” into the meeting.
- Guess the answer to a question. Misleading an official is far worse than seeming uninformed. If you do not have an answer, let them know how and when you will follow up with the information they have asked for.
- Leave without making your ask and clarity on next steps.



# CONCLUDING YOUR MEETING

## End on a positive note.

Even if you have not found anything you agree on, you can agree to keep talking. Never threaten to defeat the official in their next election. It will destroy your relationship with the official, and you can almost never deliver on that threat. Again, if nothing else, thank them for their time. You never know when the issue will be re-framed and find that all of a sudden the two of you agree again. Voila, politics.



- Ask if there are any questions.
- End on a positive note and express thanks, even if the meeting was not ideal.
- If you have been asked a question you did not know the answer to, reiterate that you will follow-up with an answer.
- For online meetings, consider pasting links to resources and supporting materials in the chat or sending them in a follow up email.
- Remind the official that you want to act as a resource.
- Invite the member or their staff to attend an upcoming event or to tour your program.

# TALKING POINTS

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## SETTING THE STAGE

- If multiple people are participating in the meeting, designate a meeting “captain” who will facilitate the flow of conversation and a note-taker who will record any questions asked by a member (or their staff) and any required follow-up.
- Each participant should introduce themselves including name; the name and location of their program or role; and a brief description.
- Thank the person with whom you are meeting for the appointment and the congressperson’s work [include a tailored thank-you based on the member’s record on issues related to sexual violence if possible].

## FRAMING THE CONVERSATION

- Email the representative, senator, or staff member any supporting materials in advance.
- Your story is the most important message you can share with a member of Congress. Personalize the issue by talking about the needs in your state or district and the people you serve.
- By sharing the needs in your community and the difficulties you face meeting those needs, you paint a picture of the critical need for funding that relates directly to the member’s constituents.

# THE NEED

## TALK ABOUT THE IMPACT OF FEDERAL FUNDING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

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- Programs aimed at preventing and responding to sexual violence such as the Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP), the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), American Rescue Plan Rape Crisis Center Relief Fund, and the Rape Prevention & Education (RPE) program have been extremely successful in our community and across the nation.
- However, many victims still have unmet needs, and we must continue to improve our responses to address and prevent the crisis of violence in many communities.
- The demand for safety and services increases with high-profile cases, national commentary (such as the #MeToo movement), better outreach, improved response, and increased awareness.
- According to a 2023 survey by NAESV, nearly 70% of programs experienced an increased demand for services last year. Current funding in most states cannot meet existing demand, let alone the increase in demand rape crisis centers across the country are experiencing.
- Sexual assault services and prevention are critically underfunded, creating a dangerous gap between desperate need and adequate resources.
- In the past few years, demand for prevention has skyrocketed, the evidence base has progressed significantly, funding is insufficient, and further investment in the RPE program is desperately needed.
- According to a 2023 survey by NAESV, at current funding levels, nearly 33% of programs have a waiting list for services and 48% of programs lack a full time therapist on staff.

# SCRIPTS

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## SERVICES & PREVENTION: HOW DO WE ACHIEVE CHANGE

- Federal funding plays an important role in helping fill the gap and meet local needs. According to the Office on Violence Against Women Report to Congress for the most recent two-year reporting period, 55,000 survivors were served with funding from the SASP.
- VOCA, a non-taxpayer fund, supports over four million victims across the nation each year.
- Tailor talking points to your specific program and the needs of your community and your program. (Example: survivors served, waiting list, increased demand).
- How many survivors do you serve?
- Do you have a waiting list and if so, how long is it?
- Have you experienced an increase in the number of people requesting services; and if so, what does that increase look like?
- What portions of your state have access to prevention? Are you able to meet the demand for prevention? What prevention successes are you seeing?

## THE SPECIFIC ASK

**Is Representative / Senator \_\_\_\_\_ willing to support:**

- SASP: \$100 million for the Sexual Assault Services program at the Office on Violence Against Women.
- RPE: Increase appropriations for Rape Prevention & Education Program at the CDC to \$100 million.
- Provide steady funding for the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Crime Victims Fund (CVF) at \$1.9 billion. If the fund cannot sustain this level of funding, Congress must find other ways to maintain steady funding for this vital program without cutting other victims services programs.
- \$30 million for sexual assault advocacy and capacity building at Health and Human Services (HHS) through the Office of Family Violence Prevention and Services (OFVPS)

# CONCLUDING THE MEETING

- Ask if the member/staffer has any additional questions.
- Make sure you have names and emails for all staff in attendance.
- Invite the member/staffer to visit and tour your program and/or to speak at an upcoming event during Sexual Assault Awareness Month or the August recess.
- Ask if the member/staffer would like any follow-up information.
- If you met with a member, send a handwritten thank you note as follow-up; an email is fine for staff.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

- Be sure to share your visit on social media!
- You can use Twitter to thank your member or post a photo to Facebook (with their permission). For example: Thank you @SenatorABC for meeting with (insert program name) to talk about critical funding for survivors of sexual assault #EndSA #BeAVoice.



**Don't know your  
member's social  
media handle?**

**You can visit this  
link to look it up:**

[tragecancer.org/  
congressional-social-media](https://tragecancer.org/congressional-social-media)

# TEMPLATE: MEETING REQUEST

Dear [scheduler's name],

My name is [name] and I am a constituent of Representative/Senator [name]; I am contacting you to request a meeting with the member during the April in-district work period on behalf of the [insert organization/state coalition].

My colleagues and I are interested in setting up a virtual/in person meeting with the member about the importance of funding rape crisis centers, supportive services for survivors of rape and sexual assault, and rape prevention in our community. These services have historically been underfunded, resulting in waiting lists, including [number] centers in [state]. The prominence of public conversations about sexual harassment, assault, and rape have resulted in an increased demand for services and prevention programs that most centers are unable to meet, forcing them to either turn away survivors in need or try to stretch their already limited funding even further.

The federal government plays a critical role in supporting rape crisis centers through programs including the Violence Against Women Act, Victims of Crime Act, Sexual Assault Services Program, and the Rape Prevention & Education program. As direct service providers, we are eager to meet with Representative/Senator [name] and share what we are seeing in the community and the consequence of failing to fund these necessary and life-saving services.

I can be reached at [number] or [email] to schedule a meeting; I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,  
[Your Name]

## Resource Tip:

**Work smart, not hard!**  
**You can download the editable version of  
this template to your to your computer.**

Find the Word document template at  
[endsexualviolence.org/toolkit-templates](https://endsexualviolence.org/toolkit-templates)



# TEMPLATE: THANK YOU EMAIL

Dear Representative/Senator [name],

Thank you for taking the time to meet with members of the [state coalition/program] on [date] to discuss the importance of funding rape crisis centers in [state] and across the country.

Federal funding plays a vital role in ensuring that rape crisis centers in [state] can meet the needs of your constituents for sexual assault services and prevention programs. While the national conversation about rape and assault has opened many people's eyes to both the prevalence of assault and its impact on survivors, it has also drawn attention to the growing gap between the demand for, and availability of, services and prevention programs in our state.

By fully funding programs including VAWA, VOCA, SASP, and RPE, you help to ensure that no survivor is turned away. You also make [community name] safer for us all.

As we discussed during our meeting...[summarize any commitment made by the member; answer any question asked during the meeting that you did not have an answer for at the time; and/or reference any materials you offered to send as follow-up].

Lastly, we would like to invite you to visit a rape crisis center during your August recess. We would be happy to help schedule and facilitate a tour so that you and your staff can see first-hand the importance of the services you make possible through federal funding.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to continuing to work with you and your office to ensure we are meeting the needs of the residents of [state/district].

Best,  
[Your Name]

## Resource Tip:

**Work smart, not hard!**  
**You can download the editable version of this template to your to your computer.**

Find the Word document template at [endsexualviolence.org/toolkit-templates](http://endsexualviolence.org/toolkit-templates)

# VISIT REPORT

## NAESV DISTRICT ADVOCACY

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DATE OF VISIT:

YOUR NAME:

PROGRAM / COALITION NAME

YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS:

NAME OF REPRESENTATIVE OR SENATOR

WHOM DID YOU MEET WITH?

EMAIL OF THE HIGHEST RANKING STAFF MEMBER AT THE MEETING:

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

QUESTIONS ASKED:

STONE OF MEETING:

**RESOURCE TIP:** Save time by submitting this report online! Use the following link to access the form:  
NAESV District Advocacy Visit Report: [forms.gle/fHeQmyhbX6dhh58P6](https://forms.gle/fHeQmyhbX6dhh58P6)

# IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

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**WHITE HOUSE SWITCHBOARD**

(202) 456-1414

**U.S. CAPITOL SWITCHBOARD**

(202) 244-3121

**SENATE REPUBLICAN CLOAKROOM**

(202) 224-6191

**SENATE DEMOCRATIC CLOAKROOM**

(202) 225-4691

**HOUSE REPUBLICAN CLOAKROOM**

(202) 225-7350

**HOUSE DEMOCRATIC CLOAKROOM**

(202) 225-7330

# LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY TIMELINE

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## 2024

APRIL

3

Prep Webinar,  
4:00 PM, EST

Hold meetings

APRIL

24-25

APRIL

4-10

Request meetings

Follow-up Deadline

MAY

6

APRIL

11-21

Gather Materials &  
Prep Call

Tour/event Month

AUGUST

1-31

# 2024 CONGRESSIONAL CALENDAR

■ Both chambers in session

■ Senate only in session

■ House only in session

## January

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
	1 New Year's Day	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15 MLK Day	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

## February

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19 Presidents Day	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29		

## March

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10 Ramadan (begins)	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29 Good Friday	30
31 Easter						

## April

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8 Ramadan (ends)	9 Eid al-Fitr (begins)	10 Eid al-Fitr (ends)	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22 Passover (begins)	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30 Passover (ends)				

## May

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27 Memorial Day	28	29	30	31	

## June

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16 Eid al-Adha (begins)	17	18	19 Juneteenth Eid al-Adha (ends)	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

## July

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
	1	2	3	4 Independence Day	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15 GOP National Conv.	16 GOP National Conv.	17 GOP National Conv.	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

## August

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19 Dem National Conv.	20 Dem National Conv.	21 Dem National Conv.	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

## September

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
1	2 Labor Day	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

## October

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
		1	2	3 Rosh Hashana (begins)	4 Rosh Hashana (ends)	5
6	7	8	9	10	11 Yom Kippur (begins)	12 Yom Kippur (ends)
13	14 Columbus Day	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

## November

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
					1	2
3	4	5 Election Day	6	7	8	9
10	11 Veterans Day	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28 Thanksgiving Day	29	30

## December

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25 Christmas Day	26 Hanukkah (begins)	27	28
29	30	31				

Sources: Offices of Senate Majority Whip Richard J. Durbin, Senate Minority Whip John Thune and House Majority Leader Steve Scalise  
Chris Hale/CQ Roll Call

Updated 11/17/23

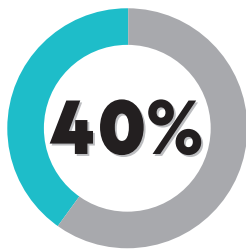
# FUND HEALING & PREVENTION for Survivors of Sexual Violence

A Snapshot from the NAESV 2023 RCC Survey

NAESV's 2023 survey exposes critical challenges facing rape crisis centers: funding cuts, staff shortages, and less ability to provide essential support services

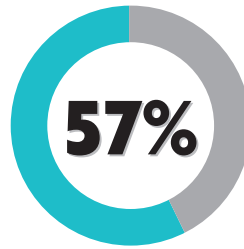
**Urgent action is needed to support sexual assault survivors and address these pressing issues in advocacy and support services.**

## DECREASED FUNDING



OF PROGRAMS REPORT A DECREASE IN FUNDING FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION & SERVICES.

## DECREASED STAFFING



OF PROGRAMS ARE EXPERIENCING A DECREASE IN STAFFING.

## DECREASED CAPACITY

DECREASED CAPACITY HAS LED TO A **DECLINE** IN ESSENTIAL SERVICES\* SUCH AS:

- 30%** PUBLIC AWARENESS & PREVENTION
- 26%** SUPPORT GROUPS
- 24%** COUNSELING SERVICES

\* **1/3** One-third of programs report a substantial **waiting list** for essential services, most commonly for counseling & support groups.



Despite funding and staffing challenges, there's been a surge in demand for sexual assault services.

**70% report an overall increase in requests for services.**



We meet the needs of survivors, but we are doing it at the expense of staff (more hotline shifts, longer hours of accompaniment, increased caseloads).

-Advocate, New York



My entire life has changed in a way I didn't think possible, simply because I took the steps to get help when it was needed & had support along the way.

-Survivor at an Alaska Program



**National Alliance to  
End Sexual Violence**



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