



national down syndrome society®

Advocacy & Public Policy

In-District Congressional Meeting Toolkit

A comprehensive guide to maximize your impact when advocating for issues at the federal level that impact the Down syndrome community.

Scheduling
a meeting

Navigating
a meeting

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and templates

Scheduling a meeting

For effective advocacy on issues that impact the Down syndrome community, it's crucial to connect with members of Congress through their district offices. Follow the steps outlined below to schedule a meeting:

1

Choose Opportune Dates: Identify periods when Congress is on “recess” or released from their official duties in Washington, DC. During these times, most legislators spend time in their districts and work out of their district offices. You can find the Congressional calendar online to understand when Congress is on recess. This will give you the best chance to meet directly with the legislator instead of a staffer. If you are scheduled with a staff member, it's okay! Staff members are a vital part of any office and will always have the ear of their member.

2

Initiate Contact: Locate the contact information of your elected officials online and reach out to their scheduler or district office director via phone or email. Introduce yourself as a constituent and express your desire to discuss issues that important to the Down syndrome community.

3

Formalize Your Request: Depending on their protocol, you might need to submit a written request for a meeting or fill out an online form. If prompted, compose an email identifying yourself as a constituent, sharing your affiliation with NDSS, and naming the specific topics and issues you wish to address. (Please reach out to the NDSS Advocacy and Public Policy team for ways we can help)

4

Follow-Up Proactively: If you do not receive a response to your request within three business days, make a follow-up call or email. Reiterate your interest in discussing issues important to the Down syndrome community and provide additional context about your affiliation and objectives. During busy times of the year, it may take up to two weeks for your request to be processed. Be patient but persistent!

5

Confirm the Meeting: Confirm a time that works for you and the elected official. Be sure to note any scheduling details provided by the office (i.e., if you need to arrive early or provide any further information). If scheduling conflicts arise, consider meeting with their knowledgeable staff.

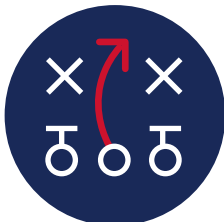
6

Mobilize a Unified Front: Consider enlisting the support of local Down syndrome community members, including self-advocates with Down syndrome. The collective presence amplifies the impact of your message and demonstrates a united concern within the community. If additional advocates are able to attend the meeting, notify the elected official's staff promptly. (If you need help finding advocates, contact the NDSS team)

If you need any support, please email policy@ndss.org and an NDSS staff member will be happy to assist you.

Navigating a meeting

During the actual meeting, employ the strategies below to effectively convey your message:



Strategic Coordination: Plan ahead with fellow advocates to allocate speaking roles and cover relevant points.



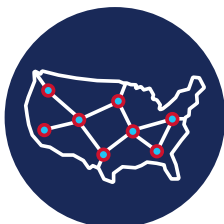
Thorough Preparedness: Craft concise yet informative statements to present your case effectively, especially in case there are interruptions or the meeting needs to be cut short.



Professional Appearance: Dress in a manner that exudes professionalism and enhances your credibility.



Supplementary Materials: Provide succinct fact sheets and resources to help legislators understand the nuances of the issues. NDSS provides many of these resources for free download on our website at ndss.org/advocacy.



Respect for Time: Arrive punctually to demonstrate your respect for the legislator's schedule.

Engage with Staff: If direct meetings with legislators aren't possible, connect with informed staff members who can convey your concerns effectively.



Constituent Identity: Clearly state your voting area and any local affiliations, establishing your status as an involved constituent.

Personal Connection: Share personal narratives and anecdotes, humanizing the issue and making it relatable.

If you need any support, please email policy@ndss.org and an NDSS staff member will be happy to assist you.

Navigating a meeting

During the actual meeting, employ the strategies below to effectively convey your message:



Focused Message: Limit the discussion to a couple of key issues to ensure depth and clarity in your presentation.



Cultivate Constructive Dialogue: Avoid lengthy debates on policy matters; instead, focus on articulating your perspective respectfully.



Showcase Support: Mention collaborating organizations and notable individuals backing your cause, underscoring its significance.



Request Specific Action: Politely make clear requests for their support, sponsorship, or commitment to specific initiatives.



Offer Expertise: Volunteer as a local resource for future inquiries, showcasing your willingness to contribute substantively.



Extend Invitations: Invite legislators to relevant community events where they can engage with constituents and learn more about Down syndrome.

Post-Meeting Courtesy: Send thank you notes summarizing the key points discussed, ensuring that your advocacy remains on their radar.

If you need any support, please email policy@ndss.org and an NDSS staff member will be happy to assist you.

Resources and templates

You can effectively champion solutions that positively impact the Down syndrome community and help drive positive legislative outcomes. The resources listed below and templates on pages 6 and 7 can help get you started.



Congressional Calendars

<https://www.congress.gov/days-in-session>



Find My Legislators

<https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>

Resources and templates

Meeting Request Template:

To: Staffer@email.gov
Subject: Meeting Request

Dear [STAFFER],

I'm a constituent and [(an individual with Down syndrome)/
(loved one of an individual with Down syndrome)] from [CITY/
STATE]. I would like to schedule a meeting with you to discuss
[H.R. 1234 (the NDSS team can help you determine this
information)], which would [brief description of the policy].
Would [Representative/Senator (Last Name of Legislator)] be
available for a meeting on [DATE]?

I would love to briefly share my story with [Representative/
Senator (Last Name of Legislator)] and discuss legislative issues
that impact the Down syndrome community.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]
[EMAIL ADDRESS]
[PHONE]

Resources and templates

Thank You Email Template:

To: Staffer@email.gov
Subject: Meeting Request

Dear [STAFFER],

Thank you for helping us connect with [Representative/
Senator (Legislator Last Name)] and sharing your time with us.

Please let me know if you need additional information or have any questions about [H.R. 1234 (NDSS-APP team can help you determine this information)], which would [brief description of the policy].

I am happy to ask the National Down Syndrome Society staff in DC to follow-up with the information or answers.

Thank you for your support!

[YOUR NAME]
[EMAIL ADDRESS]
[PHONE]

Thank You Email Tips:



1. Send it quickly

Aim to send the email within 24 hours of the meeting.



2. Personalize it

Tailor the email to the recipient to make it more meaningful.



3. Keep it professional

Use formal language, not slang or jargon.



4. Include a recap

Add a brief recap of the meeting with key takeaways.



5. Be grateful

Express gratitude for their time and effort.

6. Mention highlights

Include highlights from the event or something significant from your conversation.

7. Add a call-to-action

Include a call-to-action or review next steps.

8. Proofread

Proofread your email before sending it.