



HOMETOWN CONGRESSIONAL VISITS TO SUPPORT THE JOHNSON AMENDMENT

Visiting Your Members Of Congress At Their Home Offices

WHAT ARE HOMETOWN CONGRESSIONAL VISITS?

When Members of Congress know what their constituents are passionate about, they will more often vote accordingly.

Establishing and nurturing relationships with your Senators and Representatives is crucial to protecting the Johnson Amendment, which ensures that houses of worship and nonprofits are safe from partisan politics.

Hometown Congressional Visits are meetings that you and others in your community set up with your Members of Congress and/or their staff to maintain the Johnson Amendment. Every Senator and Representative has an office – often multiple offices – in their home state. They work from these local offices during “congressional recesses,” an important and convenient time for you to make your voice heard!

PURPOSE OF HOMETOWN CONGRESSIONAL VISITS

- 1. To ask your Members of Congress and/or key staff to support the Johnson Amendment** that protects the integrity of tax-exempt organizations by ensuring they do not endorse or bankroll political candidates.
- 2. To build relationships** between the broad number of constituents who support current law and Members of Congress and their staff who make decisions that impact our communities.

PLANNING YOUR HOMETOWN CONGRESSIONAL VISIT:

BEFORE THE VISIT

- 1. Get a team together.** Before you visit your Member of Congress, get a team together. A team ideally includes people who represent a broad array of organizations who care about the Johnson Amendment. Be strategic in finding a diverse team of community leaders who best represent your community’s call for the protection of the Johnson Amendment. Your team should commit to building an ongoing relationship with the office. Aim for 5-7 participants, though a larger group can be a powerful sign of support as well. Check with the Member’s scheduler to see how many people their office can accommodate and be sure to plan well, so that you are focused on your message and everyone knows their specific roles.
- 2. Learn about who represents your district or state in Congress.** Go to www.house.gov and www.senate.gov to find out which Members of Congress represent you and your surrounding community. Their websites and a Google search will reveal their biographical sketches, related campaign statements, past occupations, religion, political and social memberships, areas of interest and positions on other issues, all of which can inform your approach to the visit.
- 3. Have a plan.** Before your visit, always meet with the other participants to assign roles, including the facilitator, the story teller(s), who will make the specific points, and who will make the ‘ask’. Practice by role playing before the meeting so that everyone feels comfortable and knows what to do. Review your talking points and prepare your materials. You may also want to include other materials, such as talking points (located below) or polls showing widespread support for the Johnson Amendment.

Find Out More At ProjectFairPlay.org

BEFORE THE VISIT *(continued)*

Roles & Components:

The Facilitator will kick off the meeting by introducing the group, explaining the purpose for the visit, and providing space for each person to briefly introduce themselves. The facilitator will also jump in if the visit goes off-track and redirect the conversation.

The Personal Story is key to every visit. Someone should be briefly present how repealing the Johnson Amendment could split their house of worship or weaken the work of their nonprofit organization. Telling these stories will show how our communities could be negatively impacted and how your community would benefit from maintaining current law.

Point People on Specific Issues: You should decide which issues your group will want to discuss while planning the visit. Answer questions honestly. If you don't know the answer, say that you don't know but you will find out. Assign one person in the group to follow up with your Member of Congress and/or their staff.

The Ask is the critical part of the visit when you ask for the member of Congress to refuse to weaken or repeal the Johnson Amendment and to support current law. Listen carefully and ask for clarification if what they say is vague. Talking points to use are located on the last page of this toolkit. It is important though to remember that they do not necessarily need to hear every talking point; they need to hear the ones you think will most resonate.

4. Schedule a visit. Call your Member's local office to request a visit. Make sure to tell them how many other community leaders will be attending. If the member is unavailable, ask to meet with the staff who work on this issue. You may have to send an email or fill out a form. Don't be discouraged if you need to follow-up for a response. This is common practice.

DURING THE VISIT

Below is a suggested framework with a sample script in italics, but please adapt it to fit your team and Member of Congress.

Introductions

The Facilitator should start the visit by thanking the Member for their time, introducing the group as a whole, and then having each person introduce themselves briefly. Each participant should state the community, group, organizations, or network they represent to show the power of the group.

The majority of people from across communities, including religious and nonreligious, throughout (town/city/state) are committed to protecting the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment is good for the groups, organizations, and houses of worship of our hometown. Since you are part of this community as well, we want you to hear why we care about this and we'd like to know how you plan to preserve the Johnson Amendment, especially when Congress considers reforms this year. Let's start with introductions.

Specific Issue Points

Provide the Member or staff with relevant materials, including any op-ed's from local papers or other resources such as those found on the website, <http://projectfairplay.squarespace.com/resources/>.

Share your story

Have the member of your team share how repealing the Johnson Amendment could split their house of worship or weaken the work of their nonprofit organization.

Make your ask

Be specific in your ask and wait for them to answer. When they answer, listen well, and take notes and if they are vague try to clarify without being overly pushy. While they may not agree with you on all these issues, try to find common ground to continue to work on together. You'll likely not convince them to change their mind in one meeting, but you can intentionally build a relationship that can transform their perspective and stance. Much of advocacy involves listening and providing opportunities for the Member of Congress or their staff to share their priorities, concerns, and questions. Members and staff will appreciate the chance to be heard instead of only being talked at.

'We believe that in order to protect the integrity of our houses of worship and nonprofit organizations, we must recognize the safeguards that the Johnson Amendment provides and has been providing for over 60 years. Therefore, can we count on you to oppose any attempt to weaken or repeal the Johnson Amendment?'

Find Out More At ProjectFairPlay.org

DURING THE VISIT *(continued)*

Thank you & invitation

Thank them and invite them to any upcoming events having to do with the Johnson Amendment you are planning. Offer to be a resource to them, and remember to get the staffers' business cards. Consider asking them to take a photo with your group – most politicians love the photo opportunity – and send the photo to AU to be featured.

AFTER THE VISIT

Debrief your meeting

It's important to make sure you and your group are on the same page immediately after leaving the meeting while the conversation is fresh in your mind. Make sure to leave the office building, so your debrief conversation can't be overheard. As a group, review: What did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? What are the next steps? It's also important to evaluate your group's work. How did we do as a team? Share the information learned during your meeting with allied groups, including those of us in Washington DC!

Follow up with your Member of Congress

Choose one person to send the staff or Member you met an email thanking them for their time, attaching any documents you mentioned, providing answers to questions that came up during the meeting, and inviting them to any upcoming event.

Let us know how your visit went

It's very important for us know about where members stand on the Johnson Amendment. After you meet with your Member of Congress' local office please contact Bill Mefford at Americans United (mefford@au.org). Let us know how the meeting went, if they specified their position on the Johnson Amendment, and if they had any questions about legislation that we can follow up on with their DC offices.

Thank you for making these important visits!