



Virtual Visits

During a time of physical distancing when policy makers are less able to be out in their districts, it is important that constituents take opportunities to communicate their experience and opinions about the heightened public health and economic challenges. There may be something invigorating about walking up to a pillared building in your best business attire for an appointment with the powerful people you normally just encounter as newsmakers, but we can still approach the halls of power from our homes and congregations.

More widely in use during the coronavirus pandemic, but an effective option at other times too, members of Congress, state lawmakers, community boards and local officials still conduct virtual meetings with constituents, recognizing the need to connect with stakeholders' perspectives independent of being in the same room for a handshake. Physical distance need not keep you from sharing your faith-informed concerns.

Clarify the policy issue your experience and values pull you to address. Identify the leader(s) that are able to respond, considering which level of government can best address your issue of concern and whether multiple offices at different levels of government should be approached. Then turn to these tips for scheduling a meeting and connecting with your lawmakers, officials and local agencies virtually.

Group Up

- Your request for a virtual meeting will more likely be arranged if it comes from a group of four to 10 constituent attendees. Before making a scheduling request, identify the congregation or community members who will join you and determine the issues you would like to bring to your official's attention. Your request is much more likely to result in a scheduled meeting if each participant lives in the district or precinct represented by the official.
- The impact and influence of your meeting grows when unlikely partners together support the same issue. Consider reaching out to other houses of worship, service ministries or groups in your district to collaborate and strengthen the potential meeting.
- Find active policy issues described in Action Alerts at [ELCA.org/advocacy/actioncenter](https://www.elca.org/advocacy/actioncenter). Consider emphasizing this content during your meeting. Consult with an ELCA Advocacy policy director in advance of your meeting, if desired, at washingtonoffice@elca.org. A list of state public policy offices in the ELCA Advocacy network can also be used to locate informed local support ([ELCA.org/resources/advocacy](https://www.elca.org/resources/advocacy)).

Reach Out

- Request a virtual meeting with your officials through their public or legislative office website (see graphic). Meeting forms are often found under a "schedule meeting" or "contact by email" tab. See an example of



Our ELCA Advocacy Network

Reach out to your ELCA state public policy office in more than 16 states from the list available at

[ELCA.org/resources/advocacy](https://www.elca.org/resources/advocacy)

or to ELCA Advocacy national office staff at

washingtonoffice@elca.org.

We are available to answer your questions and aid you in the process.

Be part of the ELCA Advocacy Network year-round, and receive news and Action Alerts at impactful moments through

[ELCA.org/advocacy/signup](https://www.elca.org/advocacy/signup).

a meeting request form at lofgren.house.gov/contact/request-a-meeting. Include the term “Virtual Meeting Request” in your request or subject line. List the top issues you would like to discuss in your message along with the number of constituents in your group who plan to attend.

- If you do not hear back from a staff member after several days following submission of a request, call the office and ask to speak to or leave a message for the office scheduler.
- When scheduling logistics, ask the office scheduler if the meeting should be conducted using a conference line or webinar link from the office of the official or if your group should provide a means of virtual communication. If preferred by the office scheduler, offer a link that your group can comfortably use.
- Any hitches? Contact the ELCA Advocacy Office at washingtonoffice@elca.org for assistance if you have any issues sending a meeting request to the office of your representative.

Prepare

- **The Tech Part:** Be sure your entire group is technologically equipped to sign into and speak during the meeting. If members are unsure or need additional assistance, use a practice session ahead of the meeting to work out difficulties.
- **The Timeline:** Anticipate meetings to be as short as 10 to 15 minutes, as members are often very busy. Making your central point in under 2 minutes is a helpful target goal! Talk with attendees ahead of time to reinforce meeting logistics, discuss the issue(s) at hand and assign possible meeting roles to maximize effectiveness within time constraints.
- **The Background:** Get familiar with your legislator’s public statements and voting record, particularly on the issue you are raising. Voting records for federal officials are maintained at congress.gov. Consider researching recent news articles featuring the lawmaker, information on the member’s press statement page, stats or information about the congressional district and the lawmaker’s voting record on important bills. See an example of a press statement page at biggs.house.gov/media/press-releases.

Follow-up

- We all appreciate a thank you! After the meeting is complete, assign a member to send a follow-up email, thanking the office for the meeting.
- Keep the relationship ongoing. If you committed to supplying any follow-up resources or tasks, or if you want to reinforce important takeaways from the meeting, be sure to include them in subsequent messages as well.
- Tag your lawmaker, your synod and @ELCAadvocacy with a post about your meeting and how it went if you are on social media. This public post can be affirming to the relationship and the cause.

Please use the “In District Activity Form” at ELCA.org/resources/advocacy to share how your virtual meeting went with the ELCA Advocacy national office! In future interactions, this information helps us build upon one another’s efforts and strengthen our impact.

NEED A STARTING PLACE TO FIND PUBLIC WEBSITES AND CONTACT INFORMATION?

- Members of Congress** - govtrack.us
- Governors** - usa.gov/state-governor
- State legislators** - congress.gov/state-legislature-websites
- City and town officials** - usa.gov/local-governments
- Community law enforcement officials** - NAACP.org shares “Tips for Meeting with Your Police Department” at bit.ly/3ee2shr

THE INTRODUCER
starts the meeting by explaining the group’s background, including congregation and its location, and welcoming the individuals online to begin a short round of introductions.

THE ASKER
shares the top issue your group would like to discuss and what you would like your lawmaker to do on the matter. Don’t worry about being an expert with extensive stats - focus on what you know and why your group cares about the issue!

THE STORYTELLER(S)
shares a personal story, local stats or a description of how this issue intersects with their faith and your district. Keep the timing concise - aim for 2 minutes each!

THE QUESTIONER
is ready to keep the conversation from being one-sided with questions or feedback on the member’s stance. Make sure your meeting has back-and-forth flow!

THE CLOSER
thanks the member or staffer for their public service and for the time to connect. Recap any follow-up needed or commitments made in the meeting. If appropriate, consider offering a prayer for their office or your shared community.