

# Catholics Encountering Congress:

## Living the Gospel at the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering

### Our Tradition Calls Us into Public Life

“In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.... [This obligation] is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do.”

— *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 13

As Catholics, we are called to be deeply engaged in the work of our communities. This includes advocating alongside and on behalf of those who are most vulnerable in our society. When we participate in the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering, or other means of lobbying our elected leaders, we bring the gift of the Catholic faith to the public square. This is one way we live out our faith, and our voices have made a difference. For example, In the past, we’ve asked Congress to extend unemployment insurance and by the end of the week, it was included in a final spending package.

### Congressional Contacts Matter!

**An essential part of being an effective advocate is building relationships** with our members of Congress and their staff.

**We share our views from our Catholic perspective**, which deepens our commitment to our issues. Members of Congress are often people of faith as well, and this can create a moment of connection.

**You play a critical and fundamental role as constituents.** Your local perspective and stories are impactful and powerful because they reflect the reality in the member’s state or district.

**Direct interactions from constituents, like advocacy meetings, are the most effective way to influence a member of Congress**, even more so than individualized letters or emails.

These connections can and should **open up a dialogue**—the member of Congress and their staff get to hear the Church’s views on how public policy impacts people experiencing poverty and vulnerability. At the same time, they can use you as a sounding board for ideas and ask for information about the state or district and the programs you work on.

**You can establish yourself and your organization as resources** for Congressional offices. Invite them to see your programs in action.

## Preparing for Your Visit



Keep in mind, advocacy is better together! Most advocacy visits are done with a variety of people, with different amounts of advocacy experience. USCCB staff is available to assist if you have questions.

- You will **be part of a delegation** of CSMG participants from your state.
- Your delegation will be **guided by your state captain** who will schedule meetings with your Senators and coordinate efforts to schedule meetings with Representatives.
- **The meetings will take place on the last day of CSMG.**

## GET TO KNOW YOUR CONGRESSIONAL MEMBERS

### THROUGH THEIR WEBSITES:

Visit USCCB's [Legislative Action Center](#) to determine your State Senators and Representatives. Go to their websites, paying specific attention to:

- Biographies
- Committee Assignments
- Stances on Issues
- Recent Press Releases--tend to highlight the issues most important to them

A few tips:

- Look for opportunities to make a personal connection:
  - Alma Mater
  - Community and Professional Groups
  - Parish/Other House of Worship
  - Hometown
- Don't just focus on what they say--pay attention to what's NOT there. Is the member of Congress largely silent on the issues we'll be advocating?
- Don't make assumptions about their faith, politics, history, or experiences.
- Follow them! Check out their Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, and YouTube channels.

### THROUGH MEDIA:

Search local media outlets and online for articles and news broadcasts that mention initiatives or votes they have taken on issues.

- What projects have they supported?
- Which issues are most important to them?
- What programs or activities does my organization have that relate to my member's interest?

A few tips:

- Ask yourself: Is there a way I/my organization can support the work of the senator or representative? Try to determine common ground and mutual interest.
- Meeting a member of Congress can be both exciting and intimidating. The best thing you can do is prepare in advance and demonstrate your passion and dedication to the issues.

### THROUGH LEGISLATION THEY'VE SUPPORTED:

- Research the legislation they have introduced and cosponsored at the Library of Congress' legislative database: [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov)
- Read statements they have made in the Congressional Record: [congress.gov/congressional-record](https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record)

### GET TO KNOW YOUR STATE AND DISTRICT

- Think about your state or district and how it relates to the issues we'll discuss during our CSMG visits. Research specific information about how these issues impact your district, diocese, or community.
- Use these sites as resources
  - State and County poverty data from CCHD: <https://www.povertyusa.org/data>
  - Congressional District from the Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/mycd/>
  - Many [State Catholic Conference](#) and Diocesan websites have good information about the Catholic community in your state and district.

### GET TO KNOW THE ISSUES!

- Be sure to review the policy guide. This will be sent to you before CSMG and will include talking points, backgrounders (information sheets on the advocacy issues), and a Message to Congress document.
- Join the Advocacy 101 session on **Saturday** of CSMG to become acquainted with *how* to best advocate.
- Join the Legislative Issues Briefing on **Monday** of CSMG to learn *what* you will be advocating for in Congress.
- Don't miss the State Delegation meeting during lunch on **Monday** of CSMG to develop a "game plan" with your group.
- Do your best to learn about the issues, but do not become overwhelmed by this task. **Remember, you don't have to be an expert to raise issues with your member, just a constituent with concerns.**
- Practice your remarks. Hone talking points so your delegation is able to present within 10-15 minutes. Rehearsing is critical for a smooth-running meeting.

## Logistics for a Hill Visit



- The House and Senate Office Buildings are located on either side of the Capitol.
- It will take **10-15 minutes** to walk to the Senate office buildings (Russell, Dirksen, Hart) from the hotel. It will take about **20 minutes** to walk to the House office buildings (Cannon, Longworth, Rayburn) from the hotel or to walk from the House to the Senate side of Capitol Hill.
- Allow time for security.
- Please inquire at the CSMG Registration Desk if someone in your group that requires assistance to travel to Capitol Hill.

## Following Your Visit

- It is important to debrief with your delegation at the end of the visit or the end of the day.
- The [Hill Visit Report Form](#) is an important tool for measuring our impact and effectiveness. CSMG partner organizations use these reports to guide our advocacy even after CSMG ends. Fill out **one report per visit** to a Congressional office. Please include notes from your discussion and indicate any requests for follow-up from CSMG partner organizations.
- Choose someone from your state delegation to send a thank you email (ask your state captain for a template email to guide you). Be sure to include the leave-behind packet.
- Engage the media to amplify the effects of your advocacy by sharing about your visit to your broader community. Your diocesan communications director can help you. Possible media channels to consider are your diocesan website, local/regional Catholic media, social media channels within the diocese, and secular/local media.
- Congressional offices track social media to gauge public opinion. Post about what's happening during the Gathering and include pictures, where appropriate. Include the hashtag **#CSMG25** and tag your members.

Thank you!

Your voice matters!