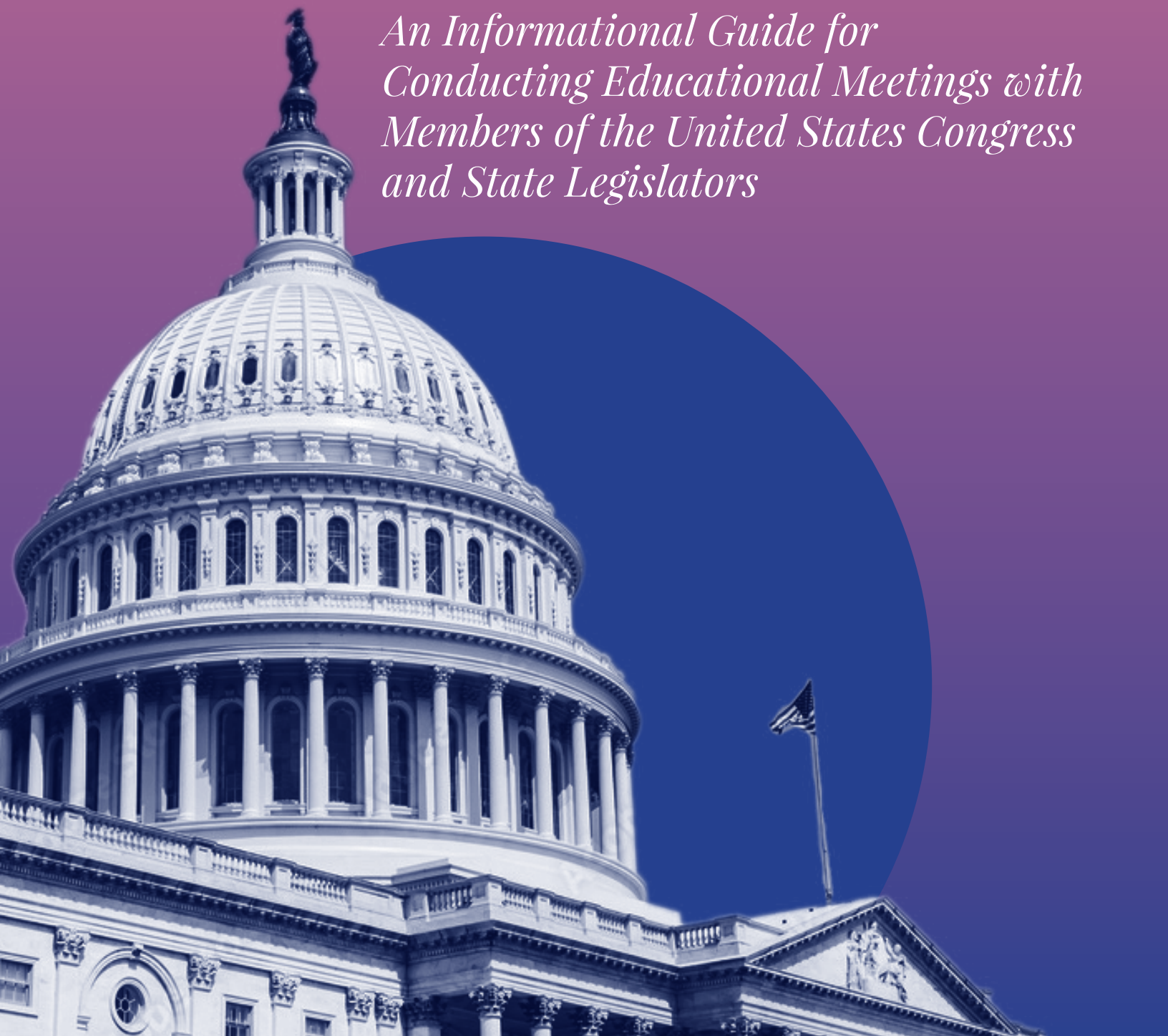

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

*An Informational Guide for
Conducting Educational Meetings with
Members of the United States Congress
and State Legislators*





In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda is a national-state partnership focused on uplifting the voices of Black women leaders at the national and regional levels in our fight to secure Reproductive Justice (RJ) for all women, girls, and gender-expansive people.

We are a collective of eight strategic partners and currently four state enhancement partners—Black Women for Wellness; Black Women’s Health Imperative; New Voices for Reproductive Justice; SisterLove, Inc.; SisterReach; SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW!; The Afiya Center; Women With A Vision; Wisdom Institute; Birth In Color RVA; The New Jersey Black Women Physicians Association; and Oshun Family Center—advocating for the human right of Black women, girls, and gender-expansive people to control our bodies, sexuality, gender, work, and reproduction.

In *Our Own Voice*: The National Black Women’s Reproductive Justice Agenda goals are:

- To establish a leadership voice for Black women on reproductive rights, health, and justice policy at the national level;

- To build a coordinated grassroots movement of Black women in support of abortion rights and access, including ending onerous funding restrictions, achieving contraceptive equity, and providing comprehensive sex education;
- To lay the foundation for ongoing policy change at the national and state levels that impacts the lives and wellbeing of Black women and their families; and
- To engage and motivate Black women as a traditionally underrepresented group to use their voting power in the American electorate.

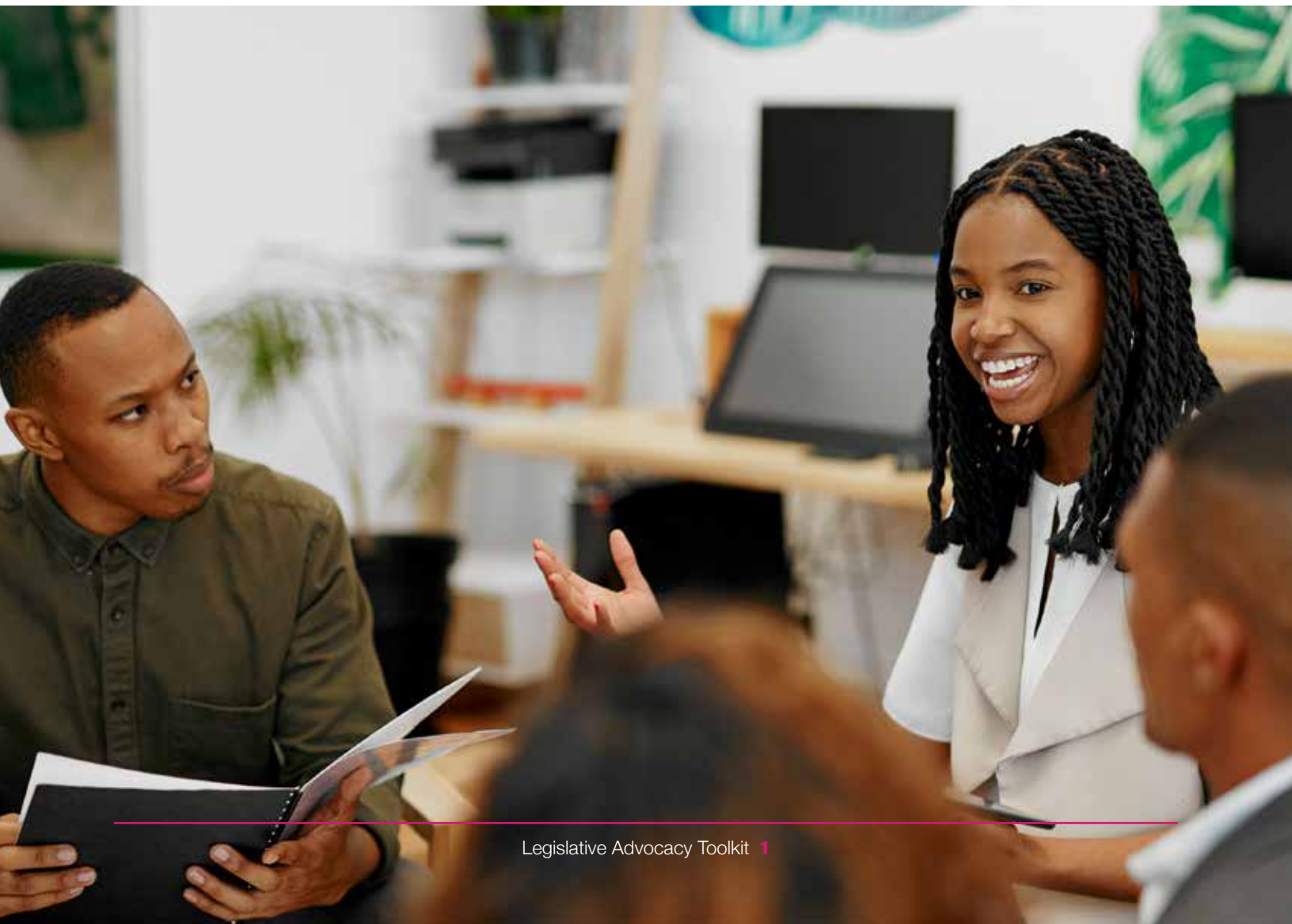
Introduction

This toolkit is intended to be used by the *In Our Own Voice* partner staff to provide tips and suggestions to assist in advocacy, policy development and implementation, and community engagement.

It is intended to be used by people with all levels of policy experience.

As state and local Reproductive Justice organizations you can make a difference in conveying the impact of policies and practices in your communities to members of Congress and state legislators. Without your help, they may not realize the real needs and tangible ways that they can improve the quality of life for Black women, their families, and the community. You have the power to educate them and engage them on important Reproductive Justice issues on Capitol Hill and in state capitols.

We want to make it as easy as possible to do just that. We created this toolkit to assist you in improving and forming a cohesive advocacy strategy and coalition in your state and will lay out the many advocacy efforts that can be utilized at the local, state, and national levels. We hope that you will find this toolkit useful.



ADVOCACY

It has never been a more important time than *now* to be a Reproductive Justice advocate.

Without the voice of those who possess both expertise and experience in Reproductive Justice, the legislation, regulations, and other policy decisions made by those in power may not reflect what is best for Black women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals. While the legislative process can be long and complex, effective advocacy does not have to be. Advocates with Reproductive Justice expertise are vital to the process and can help shape and improve policy. Through meeting with your members of Congress, writing letters, and sending emails, you have the ability to educate your elected officials and encourage them to incorporate the unique reproductive health considerations of Black women into their decisions across all policy areas. For members of Congress who already are supportive of Reproductive Justice, your advocacy presents an opportunity to transform supporters into even more vocal champions.

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is targeted action directed at changing the policies, positions, or programs at any type of institution, at any level, and encompasses a broad range of activities. Effective advocacy can:

- Educate leaders, policymakers, or administrators who implement policies.
- Alter existing policies, laws, and budgets.
- Develop new programs.
- Create more open dialogue with decisionmakers.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying

Although most people use the words *advocacy* and *lobbying* interchangeably, there is an important distinction between the two. Advocacy is educating and creating awareness among key stakeholders (e.g., state and city legislators, the general public, etc.) on issues facing the community and the importance of aligning public policy to address the needs within the community. Advocacy does not endorse or oppose specific legislation, but rather informs the community and decisionmakers at large how public policy decisions impact service provision.

Lobbying, on the other hand, is the act of asking an elected official to take a particular position on a specific piece of legislation or issue. Lobbying can often be thought of as educating a legislator on an issue and influencing legislation, including a specific request, such as explicit support of a bill or increased funding for a particular program.

Government employees and non-profit organization (501(c)3) employees are prohibited from doing *lobbying* but are not prohibited from doing *advocacy*. Educating policymakers on the facts associated with Reproductive Justice and health in their jurisdictions, key elements of programmatic activities, and efforts to address the issues are all examples of advocacy.

Quick Facts: What You Can Do:

- Share your efforts with policymakers by visiting their federal or district offices.
- Invite your members of Congress and local legislators to your offices and/or events that your organization is hosting. If possible, invite them to speak during the event.
- Call or write your representatives to share information, concerns, and personal stories about the impact of specific policies or practices on Black women and families.
- Recruit community coalition members and local advocates to meet with your congressional delegation district staff or participate in a public forum being held by your legislator(s) or candidates.
- Submit a Letter to the Editor on an issue area and the impact that Reproductive Justice legislation has on the wellbeing and quality of life for Black women.
- Provide policymakers with the background information they need to write legislation, resolutions, or proclamations for events such as Women's Health Month, Black Women's Equal Pay Day, World AIDS Day, or any awareness days that fall under the RJ framework.
- Engage in social media platforms like Twitter/X, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to reach the public, elected officials, and your constituencies.

ADVOCACY DAY & VISIT GUIDE

Ideally you will meet with the actual legislator, but for the most part you will be scheduled a meeting with the relevant staffer in the office responsible for issues such as women’s health, reproductive health, and other issues relevant to Reproductive Justice.

Before the Legislative Visit

IDENTIFY ROLES FOR THE MEETING

For group visits or visits with more than one person, be sure to plan who will speak on each issue. This will ensure that all speakers are prepared and that no issues are lost in the shuffle. You should identify a facilitator who frames the issues, hands out materials, makes sure that all the issues are covered, keeps track of time and introduces each presenter. Roles and responsibilities should include a facilitator/lead, storyteller, and who will cover each issue area.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT FROM YOUR MEETING — “THE ASKS”

When you discuss issues with a legislator or their staff, you should always have an “ask,” e.g., a request for the legislator to demonstrate support for services or programs, sign-on to a letter, or issue a resolution. This ask should be the first thing that you do after introducing yourself or the group.

KNOW YOUR TARGET

Be sure to know the party affiliation, committee or subcommittee membership of the member, and past record on the issue. These facts will help guide your discussion and convey that you have done your homework. Another important fact to know when targeting your meeting request depends on whether the member of Congress is an authorizer or appropriator. It is important to meet often with the legislators who represent your organization and/or you personally.

BRING WRITTEN MATERIALS

Make sure you have a leave-behind packet that contains pertinent information on the topics you are going to address. While introducing yourself, you can briefly go over what is provided in the leave-behind packet and point to which sheet is relevant while discussing the issues with the staffer. Do not assume that staffers will not use the materials.

BE PREPARED

Be sure you have all your facts and arguments lined up prior to the meeting. If you cannot answer a question, tell them you will get back to them with the information and be sure to follow up. Anticipate questions or arguments against your position on an issue.

During the Legislative Visit

BE ON TIME

It is very important to arrive on time, and arrive early if possible. As a courtesy, call the office if you are running late. Make sure to give yourself plenty of time to travel to the office, and account for security lines into the building.

MEETING WITH THE LEGISLATOR OR STAFFER?

Your member of Congress may not be available to meet with you and you will meet with a staff person responsible for Reproductive Justice issues. Staffers

are responsible for various portfolios, and they report directly to the legislator. Do not consider meeting with a staff member to be a negative. Legislators are very busy and rely a great deal on their staff and receive detailed reports on visits with constituents. The staffer is the individual who does the research and makes the recommendations on issues important to our movement.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Open the meeting with an introduction. Sharing your personal story if you are directly impacted by any of our priority issues in your introduction can be a powerful tool.

Legislative Visit Etiquette

DO

Wear professional attire

If multiple people are in a visit, assign someone in your group the facilitator role

Make it personal. Talk about who you are and what expertise you bring as a constituent working in the field or as a concerned community member

Offer solutions about what is working in addition to what can be done better

Be succinct and to the point when telling your story or delivering your ask

Read the staffer's body language to assess attentiveness

Assess the staffer's knowledge on Reproductive Justice policies and issues

Go with the flow

Follow up with a thank you, relevant information, and updates

DON'T

Wear jeans, t-shirts, or flip-flops

Talk over one another or leave someone without a speaking role

Leave out a human or personal element to your conversation

Complain or point fingers

Talk about 10 different things

Continue talking despite cues that the meeting is over or the staffer is not receptive

Use jargon unless staffer is well-versed

Be surprised or offended if:

- The staffer does not know about your organization or issues
- You do not get to say everything you want to
- The meeting takes place in the hallway or lobby area of the office
- The meeting is with a staff person rather than the legislator

Forget to follow up, even if no further information was requested

Some sample introductions:

Thank you for taking this meeting. My name is X and I am a lifelong resident of state Y. I am the founder of Z organization, where we work with Black women and girls who have experienced homelessness or intimate partner violence. I very much appreciate this opportunity to speak with you about some important issues for our community.

Hello, Congresswoman X. My name is Y and work at Z where I see constituents such as myself who became pregnant at a young age. I am here to talk with you about reproductive health policies and the impact in your district, and some actions that the advocacy community would like you to take to champion several issues for us such as A, B, and C.

STATE YOUR CASE

Be clear about what you hope to come out of the meeting. The legislator and/or their staff is expecting concise and clear information from you on your issue as well as a specific way they can help. Your conversation should revolve around the support you want. Since you represent a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization you cannot ask for support for a specific policy, but you can generally ask that the legislator support our issue areas, perhaps by drafting a resolution or participating in a district-level activity.

THE MEETING LOCATION AND DURATION

Given the limited space in Congressional offices, meetings happen in all sorts of places, from the legislator's office to the

hallway. You should not take it personally if you need to meet in the hallway. Most meetings will last 20 minutes at most. It is important to ask the legislator or staff in the beginning how much time they have available to meet.

THANK THE LEGISLATOR OR STAFF

Always start off a meeting by thanking a legislator for their support or ask the staff to thank their boss for you. Letting an office know that you recognize the important role they play is always appreciated.

ASSUME NO KNOWLEDGE

Legislators and staff are less familiar with your issues than you. Be sure to explain all acronyms, programs, funding sources, which agencies administer the funds, etc. Be comfortable with having to dedicate more time in the meeting to going over the basics of a program or Reproductive Justice itself.

KEEP IT LOCAL

If possible, explain your position in terms that relate to the legislator's district or state. Provide information on the status of affairs in their state. This focus helps them identify with the problem and understand why these issues should be important to them.

ASK QUESTIONS

Meetings should be seen as a two-way street, with information flowing both ways. Take the opportunity to find out where the legislator stands on the issues you are presenting if not already known to you.

Ask questions such as: *Where do you see your office standing on this issue...? I know your office has/ has not co-sponsored X; can you tell me why this is or isn't a priority for her? What do you think is the best way for us to work with your office on doing X, Y, and Z?*

STAY ON COURSE

Resist any side conversations or tangential discussions. Making social conversation is important, but time is limited. Do not hesitate bringing the conversation back by saying, "I know that in terms of our issue..." or "That's a good point but when it comes to our issue..."

USE YOUR EXPERTISE

In general, you will be much more knowledgeable of the issues than the person you are meeting with. Expound on this knowledge when explaining positions or making requests. In addition, you can offer yourself as an expert for them to call upon.

Meetings should be seen as a two-way street, with information flowing both ways. Take the opportunity to find out where the legislator stands on the issues you are presenting if not already known to you.

After the Legislative Visit

FOLLOW UP

Be sure to send a thank-you email to people with whom you met, reiterating your points, providing them with any information you promised, and thanking them for their time. The goal is to maintain relationships with offices so that they turn to you for information when legislative decisions are made.

Advocacy efforts extend beyond interacting with your members of Congress or local legislators. To amplify your message and build greater public support, you can help by communicating to the public the important role Reproductive Justice plays in improving lives. This education can take place in the form of town halls or forums about reproductive health, rights, and justice issues and the importance of advocacy. You also can use your social media platforms or submit op-eds and Letters to the Editor to local newspapers to highlight key Reproductive Justice issues and priorities.

SAMPLE EMAIL FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Please tailor to include points made in your meeting and follow-up information requested, state-specific information, and/or to invite them to visit you the next time they are back in the state or district.

[Date]

The Honorable _____

[Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

To: [Full name of health staffer]

Re: [Constituent] Meeting on [legislation/policy issue/funding decision]

Dear [STAFFER]:

I would like to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me on [date]. As we discussed in the meeting, [issues discussed] is/are necessary to ensure the wellbeing of women and their families. [You or your organization] is/are committed to [INSERT RELEVANT ISSUES] and hope [INSERT MEMBER] can join me in obtaining this goal.

I look forward to working with you to ensure [restate issues discussed]. [If you would like, add state-specific issues you would like to discuss and other relevant policy issues; be sure to include any follow-up requested of you].

Please feel free to contact me for more information. I can be reached at (###) ###-#### or myemail@email.com.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Address]

SAMPLE TALKING POINTS AND RESOURCES

Reproductive Justice Policy Talking Points:

Reproductive Justice (RJ) means the human right to control our sexuality, our gender, our work, and our reproduction. That right can only be achieved when all women and girls have the complete economic, social, and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, our families, and our communities in all areas of our lives.

- At the core of Reproductive Justice is the belief that all women and gender-expansive individuals have:
 - » the right to have children.
 - » the right to not have children.
 - » the right to nurture the children we have in a safe and healthy environment.
 - » the right to disassociate sex from reproduction.
- Access to abortion care cannot be separated from other human and reproductive rights. We trust Black women to make the important personal decisions that are best for themselves and their families. We support access to abortion care, including having insurance coverage, so every woman – regardless of her income – can access affordable and safe abortion care when she needs it.
- The dual impact of systemic homophobia and racism can harm Black women, femmes, queer, trans and gender-expansive people. We support programs and policies that ensure Black LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly youth, have the resources and the right to make healthy decisions about their lives, bodies, gender, and sexuality.
- The United States has the highest maternal death rate of all industrialized nations and is among the most dangerous places in the world to give birth. Black women in the US are three to five times more likely to experience a pregnancy-related death than their white counterparts. This is not only a public health crisis but a moral one as well. We support Black women's access to high-quality, affordable health care before, during, and after pregnancy as a critical component of our human rights.
- Black women are the largest voting constituency in the American electorate. Every year, we register voters, organize our communities, and deliver the votes that give so many local, state, and national politicians their jobs. We will continue to use the power of the ballot to elect those who understand our lived experiences, prioritize our interests, and respect our basic human rights. And we will hold elected officials accountable.
- Reproductive Justice recognizes that issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other intersecting identities are interconnected with reproductive health and rights.
- Access to affordable and effective contraception is crucial for individuals to have control over their reproductive choices.
- Addressing racial and economic disparities in maternal mortality rates is a central issue in Reproductive Justice.
- The Reproductive Justice framework addresses the reproductive rights and healthcare needs of incarcerated individuals, including access to contraception, prenatal care, and safe childbirth.



KEY LEGISLATION

- **H.R. 3305/S.1606** - The Black Maternal Health Omnibus Act (Omnibus) includes 13 individual bills that invest in solutions to the Black maternal health crisis. The comprehensive legislation includes bills to invest in the WIC program, community-based organizations, the perinatal workforce (including doulas and midwives), research, maternal mental health, support for incarcerated moms, and climate change-related risks, amongst other things. This legislation aims to address the diverse factors that impact the maternal health outcomes of Black moms and birthing people. More information: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/3305>
- **H.R. 4303** - Abortion Justice Act is a comprehensive piece of legislation that seeks to address access to abortion care and offers a comprehensive vision of what abortion access looks like when abortion care is readily available regardless of identity, background, or income. Provisions include steps to:

- » Address the need for federal investments in abortion care, including training, research, doula care, and outreach;
- » Require insurance plans to cover abortion care;
- » Affirm the right to abortion and miscarriage care;
- » Remove systemic barriers to care for immigrant families;
- » Protect patients and providers from criminalization; and
- » Address systemic disparities and systemic racism in the healthcare system.
- » More information: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/4303/text?s=1&r=12>
- **H.R. 11/S.1**- Freedom to Vote Act improves access to the ballot for all Americans, advances commonsense election integrity reforms, and protects our democracy from emerging threats. The bill also puts an end to partisan gerrymandering and roots out the undue influence of dark, special interest money in our politics, giving the voice back to the American people.

In Our Own Voice and State-Specific top issue areas include:

- Maternal Health & Pregnancy Care
- Access to Abortion Care
- Comprehensive Sexual Health Education & Contraceptive Equity
- Voting Rights

RESOURCES

To access specific information on Reproductive Justice, abortion access, contraceptive equality, and comprehensive sex education:

- Black Reproductive Justice Agenda: <https://blackrj.org/blackrjpolicyagenda/>
- Abortion Access, NARAL Pro-Choice America: <https://www.prochoiceamerica.org/fight-back-for-our-freedom/>
- Contraceptive Access, Power To Decide: <https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/access/state-policy/rh-access-policies>
- Comprehensive Sex Education, SIECUS: <https://siecus.org/state-profiles/>
- State Innovation Exchange (SiX)-Reproductive Freedom Leadership Council: <https://sixrepro.org/>

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