



**CALCASA**  
CALIFORNIA COALITION  
AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

Guide for Educating Legislators



Elected officials have the ability to shape policies which will directly impact survivors of domestic and sexual violence, their families, and communities and programs that serve them. It is critical that they hear from you.

Working together, local, state and national-level advocacy can advance legislation to support survivors and block harmful legislation. But it takes all of us, working together, to make this happen. The efforts of local advocates can amplify and build upon the Partnership and CALCASA staff efforts at the Capitol in Sacramento and Washington DC, just as our work is built upon the issues and needs you prioritize.

Your local advocacy is essential to our collective efforts to support legislation that increases safety for survivors of domestic and sexual violence and their families.

We have created this toolkit to assist you in engaging with your legislators in an easy, straightforward manner. We encourage you to email us at [policy@cpedv.org](mailto:policy@cpedv.org) and [lcamos@calcasa.org](mailto:lcamos@calcasa.org) with your comments and updates on your efforts.

This toolkit is divided into four parts for easy reference:

1. Why Engage? Grassroots Advocacy Does Have an Impact!
2. Getting Started: Get to Know Your Elected Officials
3. Responding to Action Alerts
4. In-District Meetings
5. Engaging Through Events and Other Activities
6. Ongoing Engagement with Your Legislator and Staff

The appendices provide template letters and tools for you to adapt and use.

## Why Engage? Grassroots Advocacy Does Have an Impact!

Legislators are especially receptive to the input from their voting constituents, making local advocacy a critical piece of our collective advocacy towards a California free from domestic violence. As constituents, it is you that elected officials are meant to be working on behalf of. This makes your voice far more powerful than any coming from outside the district.

Legislators want to hear about the concerns and needs of their constituents and value the ability to connect with community leaders with expertise in particular areas. Your voice and your stories are effective tools to demonstrate why domestic and sexual violence prevention and intervention services are vital to the health and safety of your community.

Would you want your elected officials voting on domestic and sexual violence legislation without hearing from you?



### *From Reactive to Proactive*

Reaching out to legislators after something has happened - legislation is introduced, budget decisions are made, key votes are taken – can be essential, but should not be the only time elected officials hear from you. You should be a resource for them year-round. Building and maintaining a relationship with your legislators are important parts of ensuring that they have accurate and local information.

It is essential that you are proactive in your outreach efforts since legislators have a limited amount of time to devote to any issue. As an expert on domestic and sexual violence in your community, when you build a relationship they will come to look to you for resources and information when deciding on their positions on legislation affecting prevention and intervention services and other legislation that will benefit survivors.

### *Together, You're Stronger*

As you develop your advocacy efforts, we urge you to consider bringing together a group to participate that represents the diverse community you serve. Working with local partners and engaged community members can effectively amplify your voice and help to spread your message. Consider including new and seasoned advocates, survivors who can speak directly to the issues they face, and allied community partners. Reach out to your existing partners and potential new allies, including those in the civil rights, anti-poverty, women's rights, religious, and education communities. Discuss what is and what isn't working in your community, and develop plans to work together to affect change. Although building these partnerships takes time and effort, it is well worth the hard work to build a stronger local effort and produce a greater impact. Together, you are the experts and local leaders capable of effecting change in your community.

Working a collaborative group demonstrates to your elected officials the range of constituents impacted by an issue. It can be a great way to build community among the participants and make a larger impact. Plus, bringing together more people means you don't have to do it all yourself – and if you start to get nervous during a meeting with an elected official, you have a whole group ready to help out.

### *My Elected Official Is Always Supportive – Do I Really Need to Do This?*

Yes! It is wonderful if your elected officials are always supportive, but hearing from you is still critical.

- *Positive reinforcement matters:* Elected officials generally want to help survivors, and hearing your support for their efforts can let them know they're on the right track.
- *Moving supporters to champions:* If your elected official(s) consistently supports the needs of survivors, perhaps they can take that support one step forward and champion our legislation, speak out publicly on the issues, or take other steps to move beyond just supporting to being a true champion.

## **Getting Started: Get to Know Your Elected Officials**

Before you meet with your elected officials, you'll want to know who they are and what issues they care the most about. Generally, you will have two elected officials representing you in Sacramento, your Assemblymember, and State Senator. To find your local Assembly member and Senator, visit: <http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov/>



In Congress, you have one Representative, who you can find at <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>. California's two US Senators are Senator Diane Feinstein and Senator Kamala Harris.

To learn more about your United States Senators and Representative, visit: [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) and [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov).

### *Read Their Official Biography*

Typically, each elected official's page includes their official biography. We encourage you to read their information, review the issues they indicate are their priorities and note the committees they serve on and any information on past history of votes on your issues.

### *Sign Up for Their Newsletter*

These newsletters contain important information such as upcoming in-person meetings you can attend and issues that are being discussed at the state and federal level. You can usually sign up for their newsletter directly through their websites, which you can navigate to through <http://assembly.ca.gov/>; <http://senate.ca.gov/>; <http://www.house.gov/>; and <http://www.senate.gov/>.

### *Know Where the District Offices Are*

Check your elected official's website and figure out where the district offices are. These offices are where meetings are most likely to be held, and where you can meet with your representative and staff to discuss your concerns.

## Responding to Action Alerts

Your elected official was elected by you and has a responsibility to your community. Your voice and the voices of your community are important. You are the most knowledgeable person about the work you are doing – share your thoughts with your elected official about the issues you care about. You are responsible for sharing your voice with your elected official. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly - would you want your elected officials voting on domestic and sexual violence legislation without hearing from you?

### **Do Follow These Tips When Responding to Action Alerts**

- Take action ASAP – these alerts are typically time-sensitive ahead of a key vote or hearing. We try to give you as much notice as we can, but it is often urgent.
- Pick up the phone! Calls are the most impactful way to make your voice heard. Calls are quick, and only take a few minutes to make.
- Try again if you don't get through the first time. During mass action alerts, a legislator's office can easily get overwhelmed with more calls than they can answer. This is a sign of impact! Wait a few minutes and call again.
- Reach out to the district office as well as the Capitol office.
- Identify yourself and mention the name of your organization, and that you are a constituent, and that you serve domestic violence survivors in the district.
- Always be friendly and respectful.





- Ask for the name of the staffer to speak with on the issue, and to speak with them.
- Send a follow-up email reminding the legislator or staff of the issues discussed and any commitments that were made.
- Thank the legislator or aide for their time.
- Share the alert with your networks and encourage folks to also take action.
- Tell the Partnership and CALCASA you took action! Email us at [policy@cpedv.org](mailto:policy@cpedv.org) and [lcampos@calcasa.org](mailto:lcampos@calcasa.org). This helps us track our collective impact.

### **Avoid These Items When Responding to Action Alerts**



- Rely on Tweeting and Facebook posts to get your message through. This is largely ineffective, especially for Members of Congress.
- Assume that your legislator needs to hear from you. Whether your legislator is a champion, ambivalent, or routinely opposes your priorities, they still need to hear from you.
- Assume your action won't matter. Your action, combined with others, creates a ripple effect. If we all believe we won't have an impact and don't take action, opposing views are the only ones being heard.
- Only send an email. Emails can easily get lost in the shuffle for staff. Legislative staff may receive more emails than anyone else we know! The generic office email is often checked by an intern or very junior staffer, not the legislator.

## **In-District Meetings**

It is worth remembering that the best way to build a relationship is through in-person meetings. Emails and phone calls are effective and especially important to maintain relationships, but face-to-face meetings build a stronger connection. As a constituent and representative of your domestic violence organization, your legislator and his/her district office staff will look forward to hearing from you and meeting with you.

### **Convening a Successful Meeting**

- Generally, legislators are in their district office on Friday, during the legislative recess, and holidays. *Schedule in-district meetings during these times when you can.* The 2017 In-District Calendar is available in Appendix B of this toolkit, and available on the Partnership's website. There are also at a glance calendars available for the State Legislature, the U.S. House of Representatives, and the U.S. Senate.
- Don't be disappointed if you meet with a staff person. Legislators rely on their staff for detailed information on specific issues, and building a relationship with the staff can be just as important as speaking directly with the legislator.
- Bring your group and come prepared. Make sure everyone knows their roles and talking points for the meeting.
- Have a clear ask. Share your position on specific legislation, and explain how the legislation will impact the survivors you serve. Make sure the legislator knows what action you want them to take, and on what specific bill.



- Focus on local issues. Connecting pending legislation back to the local needs and issues is invaluable, and the most effective tool you have to make the case for why they should take particular positions on legislation.
- Remember that you don't need to have all the answers. If a legislator asks you a question, it's okay to say that you don't know. Be sure to follow-up and get back to them with information after the visit.
- Bring materials to leave behind. Fact sheets or other materials are helpful, as they allow the legislator or staffer to easily share information with others in the office. *Be sure to keep it brief and concise*—legislators and their staff meet with many groups on a daily basis and receive lots of materials. You don't want to overload them with unnecessary items.
- Be friendly and respectful, even if make it clear you disagree with their position.
- Follow-up. Thank them for the meeting, reiterate the main points discussed, and send electronic copies of your collateral materials.
- Tell the Partnership and CALCASA about your meetings! Email us at [policy@cpedv.org](mailto:policy@cpedv.org) and [lcampos@calcasa.org](mailto:lcampos@calcasa.org). We can help provide materials and talking points, and knowing about your meetings helps us track our collective impact.

## Engaging through Events and Other Activities

Inviting your legislator(s) and their staff to your events is an effective way to educate them about the services you provide. It helps to put a personal image to the work and provides a memory with stronger staying power than a meeting in their office. Even if they are unable to attend, the invitation is a way to keep your work and successes in their minds.

### Invite Your Legislator to Tour Your Facilities

A very effective way to create a lasting memory of the services you provide is to show your legislator your facilities. They may have no idea what a domestic violence shelter or a legal aid organization looks like, or what services you provide every day. When your legislator is voting on whether to fund domestic violence shelters or services, you want them to have a clear understanding of those services.

- Designate a staff member to give the legislator a tour.
- Show your legislator where you provide vital, life-saving prevention and intervention services in your organization
- Remember to have the attendees sign a confidentiality agreement if needed.
- Introduce your legislator to staff, volunteers, and clients (if these individuals would like to meet the legislator).
- Take a picture with the legislator or staffer and share it on social media! Consider sending a copy of the photo to the legislator with your thank you note.



## **Invite Your Legislator to Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, Denim Day, and Other Agency Events**

Legislators often only hear from constituents that are unhappy with their work. Consider this your opportunity to recognize your legislator's efforts around domestic and sexual violence as well as to give them an opportunity to engage with their constituents in a positive setting. This is an easy way to incorporate your legislator in your already-planned events that deliver educational information in a compelling and memorable manner.

- Can the legislator attend the events?
- Can your legislator play an important role, such as giving a keynote address?
- Can your legislator receive an award as a champion for domestic violence issues?

## **Attend the Legislator's Town Halls and Other Public Events**

Legislators will regularly hold town hall meetings and other public events to connect with their constituents. These are a great opportunity to raise the issues that matter to you, and get your legislators to publicly take a position – and hopefully, commit to supporting your issues. By speaking up at a public event, you also educate the rest of the community members in attendance about the importance of domestic and sexual violence programs, funding, and relevant legislation.

## **Ongoing Engagement with Your Legislator and Staff**

Legislators and their staff are expected to take positions on a wide range of issues. They often know a little about a lot of subjects and perhaps only have one or two areas of expertise. That's why they appreciate having connections with people who have a wealth of knowledge and experience in specific fields.

- Get to know the relevant staff. Legislative staff handle various issue areas. Find out who handles domestic and sexual violence for their office, and contact that staff person directly.
  - Tip: If the office isn't sure who handles domestic and sexual violence issues, ask for the Women's Issues staff or the Judiciary staff.
  - Email addresses often follow a standard format, so once you know the staff person's name, you can usually guess at their email.
    - Assembly: [First.Last@asm.ca.gov](mailto:First.Last@asm.ca.gov)
    - State Senate: [First.Last@sen.ca.gov](mailto:First.Last@sen.ca.gov)
    - House of Representatives: [First.Last@mail.house.gov](mailto:First.Last@mail.house.gov)
    - US Senate: [First.Last@SenatorLastName.senate.gov](mailto:First.Last@SenatorLastName.senate.gov)
- Be proactive! Contact your legislators and provide them with information when policy issues arise.
- Staff find both statistical and anecdotal information helpful. Personal anecdotes about the survivors you serve, success stories and tragedies, as well as data can all be used by a legislator for their speeches, press releases, and other efforts to advocate for policies supporting survivors.





- Provide agency brochures for the legislator’s capitol (DC or Sacramento) and district office staff to distribute as needed. Survivors will occasionally contact their legislator’s office, so these resources can be a valuable tool to ensure the survivor receives needed services.

### **Keep Your Legislators Apprised of District Issues**

Legislators try to keep up-to-date on news in their districts; however, due to the large amount of information, some news might not make it onto their radar. Being proactive is essential to make sure that domestic violence remains at the forefront.

- Send relevant newspaper articles, along with a letter to connect the dots to pending legislation and the needs of your community.
- Alert your legislators of your organization’s significant achievements in the community.
- Share client success stories (but be sure to withhold identifying information).
- Forward significant press releases to your legislators and/or their staff.

### **Include Your Legislators in Your Organization’s Communications**

This is a simple way to keep connected to your legislators, but should not be your only means of connecting with the legislator.

- Add your legislators to your organization’s mailings and newsletters.
- “Like” your legislators’ pages on Facebook or “follow” your legislator on Twitter. They will often follow you back.
- Post consistent status updates on Facebook/Twitter about your organization and current events in the community.

### **Use Media and Stories to Engage the Community and Your Legislators**

Stories that demonstrate both the severity of domestic and sexual violence and the successes of programs and survivors are a powerful way to connect with the community and your legislators. These personal stories shine a different light on the issue that can’t always be conveyed through statistics and other data.

Legislators want to stay connected to their district, and will frequently read the local newspapers. These publications can have much more sway than big DC or Sacramento publications. Letters to the editor, opinion pieces, and other media attention can be an important way to reach your legislator and your community. We encourage you to engage with the media and your community to make sure that domestic and sexual violence receives appropriate media coverage, rather than the sensational or even harmful ways in which it is often portrayed.

- Submit a Letter to the Editor in your local paper in response to a recent article.
- Submit an Op-Ed about pending legislation.





## Appendix A: Templates for Writing to Your Legislators

### Template Meeting Request/Invitation Letter

*Use your organization's letterhead*

Your Name

Your Address

Date

The Honorable Jo Doe

California State Assembly/Senate

State Capitol, Room \_\_\_\_\_

Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assemblymember/Senator Doe,

Paragraph 1, Introduction: Identify yourself, your organization, and the area it serves.

Paragraph 2, Request: Specify when and where you would like to meet with your legislator. Provide a few details about the topic to be discussed (for example, domestic and sexual violence funding or pending legislation). If you are inviting the legislator to an event, clarify if you would like them to speak during the event.

Thank you for considering this request. To confirm the meeting, please contact \_\_\_\_\_ at (*phone number*) or (*email*). I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Name

Title

Organization



## Template Thank You Letter

*Use your organization's letterhead*

Your Name

Your Address

Date

The Honorable Jo Doe

California State Assembly/Senate

State Capitol

Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assemblymember/Senator Doe,

We want to thank you for meeting with us on *(date)*. We realize how busy your schedule is and appreciate being able to meet with you and discuss \_\_\_\_\_.

*Put something positive and specific about your meeting here.*

*Re-state any commitments that were made during the meeting, and/or your main requests.*

Please review the packet we left with you and let us know if you need any further information.

We look forward to working with you in the future. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns related to \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

Name

Title

Organization



## Appendix B: 2017 In-District Calendar

### In-District Work Periods 2017

Dates	State Legislature <sup>1</sup>	US House <sup>2</sup>	US Senate <sup>3</sup>
Jan 16	X	X	X
Feb 20	X		
Feb 20 - Feb 24		X	X
Mar 16 - Mar 17			X
Mar 31	X		
Apr 6 - Apr 14	X		
Apr 10 - Apr 21		X	X
May 8 - May 12		X	
May 29	X		
May 29 - Jun 2		X	X
July 3 - July 7		X	X
July 4	X		
July 22 - Aug 20	X		
July 31 - Sept 4		X	X
Sept 18 - Jan 3	X		
Sept 18 - Sept 22		X	
Sept 21 - Sept 22			X
Oct 9 - Oct 13			X
Oct 16 - Oct 20		X	
Nov 10			X
Nov 20 - Nov 24		X	X
Dec 18 - Dec 29		X	X

\*\* State Legislature adjourns on 9/15/17

\*\* Last day for Governor to sign/veto bills is 10/15/17

<sup>1</sup> <http://assembly.ca.gov/legislativedeadlines>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.majorityleader.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2017-MONTHLY-CALENDAR.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.senate.gov/legislative/2017\\_schedule.htm](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/2017_schedule.htm)



## State Legislature Calendar: At A Glance

Legislators In-District = Blue

# 2017

### JANUARY

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- State Legislature adjourns on 9/15/17
- Last day for Governor to sign/veto bills is 10/15/17



## U.S. House of Representatives Calendar – At a Glance

Representatives In-District = Purple

# 2017

### JANUARY

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# U.S. Senate Calendar – At a Glance

Senators In-District = Green

# 2017

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17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

## OCTOBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

## NOVEMBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

## DECEMBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						