How to Talk to Congress

Whistleblowers of America

Meeting with Your Congressional Members and Staffers Toolkit

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Congressional staffers have significant influence in the modern Congress. Get to know the staffers who work on your issues and educate them (Gibson 2020)



Employees have a right under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to communicate with Congress, but you should be ready to do so effectively and know that there still might be some risk of reprisal even though whistleblower laws prohibit it.

Introduction

Citation: Goldschmidt, K., & Sinkaus, B. J. (2022). Building trust by modernizing constituent engagement. Congressional Management Foundation. https://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF_Pubs/cmf-building-trust-by-modernizing-constituent-engagement.pdf

This guide was created to empower whistleblowers, families, and advocates with the tools to safely and effectively engage with Members of Congress. If you have experienced retaliation, moral injury, or systemic failure in your workplace, this guide can help you translate that lived experience into strategic advocacy. There are rules for engagement that are often overlooked or misunderstood when trying to go it alone so Whistleblowers of America has organized this guide to help you be more effective in your outreach to your House Representative, Senator or a Committee of Jurisdiction.

Before you Begin: Define your Purpose

Ask yourself:

- What issue or concern do I want Congress to address that benefits the greater good?
- Am I seeking legislation or oversight?
- What change can be effectively made by my disclosure to Congress?

Understanding the Role of Congress

Congressional offices can:

- Submit inquiries to federal agencies about an issue ("Congressional Inquiries")
- Request an Federal agency Inspector General (IG) investigations or the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to report
- Request a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) overview of an Appropriation or funding issue
- Request an analysis from the Congressional Research Service (CRS)
- Propose or support specific whistleblower protection legislation
- Hold oversight hearings on systemic failures

Congressional offices cannot:

- Overturn agency rulings, especially those related to Administration personnel
- Act as attorneys or legal advisors to individuals
- Guarantee job reinstatement or financial compensation

Know Your Issue

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- Be prepared to clearly explain your issue (i.e.: fraud, contamination, safety, wrongful deaths) and what are the consequences of the wrongdoing to the public or specific populations?
- Gather information legally about your disclosure and your evidence (i.e.: a substantiated investigation, accounting audits)
- Do your homework. Which United States Code (USC) laws that Congress passes apply to your disclosure
- The First Amendment of the Constitution gives you the right to address Congress, but be aware that there are agency limitations to go directly to Congress without an agency liaison. Ensure confidentiality if you fear reprisal.
- Develop ground rules for your working with congressional offices, specify your desires for confidentiality and any limitations around the use of your evidence.
- Seek support from appropriate organizations (law firm, union, professional, civic, or a veterans service organization)
- Create short statement of disclosed issue (500-700 words) and proposed call to action
- Make a list of the documents that Congress could request or draft questions to ask the agency.
- Practice and get assistance editing what you write or want to say so it is clear to someone else.
- Optional information: resume, timeline, organization chart, research studies to help focus the action that you are advocating.

Do You Know Your Congressional District Members?

Unsure who your congressional representative or senators are? Get on the computer and enter into address bar:

- https://www.house.gov/
- https://www.senate.gov/

Identify your legislators – Click on their names for their home page

- One representative in your district
- Two Senators (per state)
- DC Office
- Field Office (local) - Find phone numbers on the website. Call to schedule an appointment or leave a message about your issue.

Is there a Committee with jurisdiction over your issue?

- Committees | house.gov
- U.S. Senate: Committees

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- Whistleblowers can obtain general resources from the Office of the Whistleblower Ombuds (Note: This office does not handle whistleblower complaints) Whistleblower Resources | Office of the Whistleblower Ombuds (house.gov)
- ***Do not forget about your local state and municipality government as they might have a vested interest in your disclosure as well,*** if their constituency is affected. You can look up Congress and Local Elected officials Congressional Representatives Lookup

Scheduling the Congressional Appointment

Virtual or in-person, you can meet with congressional staff by:

- Visiting Congress Members to find your Senator or Representative.
- Clicking on their name to access their official website, then locating the **"Contact"** or **"Request a Meeting"** page.
- Submitting a request form or calling the local or D.C. office. You can also call the Capitol Switchboard at **(202) 224-3121** to be connected.
- Ask to speak with a staffer who handles your issue — e.g., military affairs, labor, environmental safety, health, or oversight.
- Be persistent and polite. Leave a voicemail or email if no one is available. ***Follow up within 5 business days if you haven't received a response.***

Whether in person or virtual, provide:

- A 1-page summary of your case or concern. Make copies to leave with the office
- A timeline, document excerpts, or public records (no confidential evidence)
- A policy ask (e.g., support legislation, call for oversight)
- A short bio and your contact information

Always email these before or after the meeting, so staff can reference them.

Sharing Your Story: Brief but Impactful

- Use a 3–5 minute summary that includes:
    - Who you are and your area of expertise
    - The issue you encountered (corruption, fraud, safety, discrimination, etc.)
        - The retaliation is secondary to Congress, unless you are specifically asking about whistleblower protection laws
    - How it impacts others or the public (beyond just you)
    - What you have already tried to resolve it (e.g., internal complaints, IG reports)
    - Stay focused and avoid personal venting. If emotions arise, pause, take a breath, and return to the key message: systemic change.

Framing Your Ask

Ask for support that aligns with the office's jurisdiction. Examples:

- "Would you support a bill to extend whistleblower protections to military personnel?"
- "Can your office request a Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation?"

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- "Would you support a hearing on retaliation in federal contracting?"

Also ask:

1. "Can I provide a written statement for the Congressional Record?"
2. "Are you planning oversight hearings related to this topic?"

Always make a clear, actionable ask when you meet with Congressional staff!

Sample Scripts for Whistleblower Outreach

Sample Script for Calling a Congressional Office:

> "Hi, my name is [Your First Name], and I'm a constituent from [Your City/ZIP Code]. I'm calling to request a meeting with [Member of Congress's Name] or the staffer who handles whistleblower protection and government oversight. I would like to share my concerns as a whistleblower and ask for the Member's support on related issues."

Email Letter

Additional Email Talking Points for Congressional Staffers

- Introduce yourself: name, role, location.
- State your reason for reaching out and the core issue (1–2 lines).
- Request a meeting or written response.
- Mention bill numbers or topics (e.g., workplace safety, VA reform).
- Offer to provide testimony, a statement for the record, or other documentation.

Sample Email Opener:

"Dear [Staffer Name],
My name is [Your Name], and I am a [federal/state/contract] whistleblower seeking a brief meeting to share concerns about public safety, retaliation, and oversight failures within my agency. I am reaching out to request 15 minutes of your time. Thank you for your consideration."

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Letter Template to Congress

[Your Full Name]

[Your Address]

[City, State, ZIP Code]

[Email Address]

[Phone Number]

[Date]

The Honorable [First Last Name]

[U.S. House of Representatives or U.S. Senate]

[Office Address]

[City, State, ZIP Code]

Dear [Representative/Senator Last Name],

As a constituent and [brief personal identifier—e.g., federal employee, military veteran, whistleblower], I respectfully urge you to take action regarding [issue: e.g., whistleblower retaliation, oversight gaps, or pending legislation].

I experienced [brief statement of harm], and I believe this reflects a broader systemic failure impacting public trust, institutional safety, and ethical accountability.

Please support [H.R. XXXX or S. XXXX] and consider advocating for stronger whistleblower protections, oversight hearings, or funding mechanisms to prevent further harm.

I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with your staff further on this matter and provide written or oral testimony if helpful.

Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent concern.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

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Do's and Don'ts

✅ *DO:*

- Practice your narrative beforehand
- Bring a notepad or take digital notes
- Speak slowly and allow time for questions
- Maintain emotional awareness — your story is powerful, but policy clarity is what moves action
- Ask how best to follow up

❌ *DON'T:*

- Share classified/confidential material without clearance
- Overwhelm staff with too many documents or grievances
- Make it personal about you or others in your agency
- Assume the staff knows (or do not know) all the related policies — educate them calmly

The Staff Meeting

Start the meeting with:

- Introduce yourself – use your title
- Your first and last name and professional or community background (e.g., "I am a federal engineer and a constituent from California.")
- A brief explanation of why you're meeting (e.g., "I'm seeking legislative support to strengthen whistleblower protections in public safety roles.")
- A statement that you are speaking in your personal capacity, especially if you are a federal employee or military-affiliated.
- Thank them for taking time out of their busy schedule upfront
- Icebreaker and bonding - Ask if they have visited your town, their likes?
- Quick definition of your profession and expertise on the issue (OK to provide summary in emailed handout)
- If member already co-sponsored- thank them for their support
- Arrive on time-including virtual meetings (practice using virtual platforms prior to meeting and check your audio and visual capabilities.
- Also know its features so you can screen share, white board, chat, record, or see participant list if necessary.
- Dress professional - even for virtual meetings
- Bring or email prepared handouts reflecting your position - placed neatly in a folder, but do not overwhelm staff with reams of evidence, especially if there are national security or potential privacy concerns. Share the list of potential documents and draft questions that they could ask the agency.

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- Research if member has already co-sponsored current or previous bills on the topic
- Provide business or personal card (email address)

Important: Do not disclose confidential names or information without written consent. Protecting yourself and others is key. Do not slander or defame government officials or colleagues.

- **Give a quick overview**
    - Hone in on the message (bare essentials) and how does this impact their constituents (Gibson 2020) not just your personally (For Federal employees, remember the separation of powers between Legislative and Executive Branch over personnel issues.)
- Educate the personal office or committee member staffer - keep the language simple
- Monitor your emotions – this can be triggering to talk about so practice your narrative. Congress likes putting a face to an issue, but it has to be a balanced message and relatable.
- Ask about potential plans for legislation, oversight hearings, or mark ups
- Find out what issues or legislative action (an authorization) they are interested in and work within those confines, like budget (an appropriation)
- Ask if you can write a statement for the record, testify as a witness, or get other support
- Ask for an investigation into the wrongdoing. Congress may not necessarily be able to protect you from internal retaliationT, but they can be of assistance if the retaliation involves assisting Congress with an investigation. Congress can request the agency Inspector General or the Government Accountability Office for a report, for example.
    - The House Whistleblower Ombuds Office has created this fact sheet on holding retaliations accountable: https://whistleblower.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/whistleblower-evo.house.gov/files/Holding_Retaliators_Accountable.pdf
- Do not talk too fast or too much. Allow pauses for questions.
- Request permission for photos or virtual meeting screenshots of participants, especially if you are going to ask for media coverage of the meeting. Involve the Office's Communications Director.

Body Language

- Provide eye contact throughout meeting
- Look interested when they speak (head nods etc., take notes)
- Remember those emotional triggers – stay polite, civil, and calm even if you are not getting the response you want. It might be time to rethink strategy and approach!
- If staffers seem bored, hurried, or looking at their watch, wrap it up quickly. They are busy!

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Ending the Congressional Meeting

Closing the Meeting

- Ask for a point of contact to follow up with next week
- Thank them for their time and interest,(exit with a smile and positive comment)

If appropriate, ask:

"Would you be comfortable with a quick photo or screenshot to raise awareness?"

- Then send a follow-up email within 24–48 hours:
- Thank them again
- Summarize your main request
- Include any resources you promised to share

Attach a copy of your 1-pager or timeline. Ask how you can best help and if additional information is needed for further action

Post Congressional meeting

- Follow up on the tasks that you committed to complete
- Share information with other interested peers and support network for feedback
- If you have cleared communications, share results on Social Media or with news outlets and ask them to share any progress
- Share results with an interested organization's Government Relations, get more feedback
- Plan your next steps in your strategy

Alternatives When You Can't Meet Face-to-Face with Congress

If you are unable to schedule a direct meeting with your elected official, you can still make an impact through the following methods:

***Call the Capitol Switchboard**:*
Dial (202) 224-3121 or (866) 272-6622 to be connected to your Representative or Senator's office.
→ **Tip:** Ask to speak with the staff member who handles your specific issue area (e.g., whistleblower protections, military justice, federal employment).

***Call the Local Office**:*

- Find your legislator's district office number on their official website.
- Leave a message with your name, location (ZIP Code), and your position on the legislation. Be clear:

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"I'm calling to ask [Rep./Sen. Name] to support H.R. [XXXX] or S. [XXX]. Thank you."

***Write a Letter or Email**:*
Use a clear and respectful format (see sample in toolkit).
→ Letters can be mailed to the member's DC or local office.
→ Emails can often be submitted via the contact form on the legislator's official website.

***Use Social Media Strategically**:*
Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and TikTok can be powerful tools to share your message publicly.
→ Tag your member directly using their verified handle.
→ Keep posts respectful, concise, and issue-focused.

Example: "I support H.R. XXXX to protect whistleblowers. @SenatorDoe, please stand up for truth and accountability. #ProtectWhistleblowers #EthicsMatter"

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ADDENDUM

Letters to Congress, especially from their constituents, are still a great communication tool. Mail is tracked and taken seriously by members of Congress. (Although mail may take awhile to get through the security screening process and be assigned a responder.)

Keep letters to one page or short enough to make no more than 3 points on the same issue. Do not discuss multiple issues in one letter to ensure better communication and response.

Recommended Resources for Congressional Letter Writing

- National Council on Family Relations (NCFR): Communicating with Congress

Offers best practices for writing impactful letters to legislators, emphasizing clarity and personalization.

Access the guide here: NCFR: Communicating with Congress

- Congressional Management Foundation (CMF): How to Communicate with Congress

Provides insights into effective communication strategies with congressional offices, including letter writing tips.

Explore the resource here: CMF: How to Communicate with Congress

- CMF: How to Write a Better Letter to Congress

Details key elements of persuasive letters, such as specificity, brevity, and personalization.

Read the article here: CMF: How to Write a Better Letter to Congress

- CMF: Writing Letters (or Email)

Discusses the importance of constituent correspondence and offers guidance on crafting effective messages.

Access the information here: CMF: Writing Letters (or Email)

These resources provide recommended guidance on composing effective letters to Congress, ensuring your message is clear, concise, and impactful. Send any questions about this process to info@whistleblowersofamerica.org

If you are interested in the progression of legislation, track bills and policy issues with:

- https://www.congress.gov/browse - All House and Senate legislation

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- https://www.senate.gov/legislative/bills_acts_laws.htm - Senate only tracker
- https://www.house.gov/ - House only tracker
- GovTrack.us – Non Government tracker for federal legislation
- LegiScan – Monitor legislation in all 50 states.
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- https://whistleblower.house.gov/ - House Whistleblower Ombuds Office (they do not take cases)

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Glossary of Common Advocacy Terms

- **Appropriation:** Legislation that funds authorized programs, usually passed annually.
- **Authorization:** A bill that establishes or continues a federal program or agency and outlines its duties.

- **Bicameral** - The two branches of Congress - House and Senate. Legislation has to pass both chambers before heading to the President for signature.

- **Bipartisan** - agreement or cooperation between political parties.

- **Congressional Budget Office (CBO) -** nonpartisan office that provides budget and economic analysis to Congress.

- **Congressional Research Service (CRS):** nonpartisan research service providing policy analysis and history of an issue to Congress.

- **Government Accountability Office (GAO):** A nonpartisan congressional agency that investigates how the federal government spends taxpayer dollars.

- **H.R. -** House Resolution (followed by a number)

- **Legislative Hearing -** A congressional hearing to review specific legislative language under the Committee's jurisdiction. This sometimes happens as a result of an Oversight Hearing.

- **Mark-Up:** When a congressional committee debates, amends, and rewrites proposed legislation before sending the bill to the floor of the House for full vote.

- **Nonpartisan** - Without a political agenda, bias, or affiliation towards any particular party.

- **Oversight Hearing:** A congressional hearing to review a federal agency's policies, performance, or conduct. This usually is designed to inform legislation.

- **S.** - Senate resolution (followed by a number)

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