



2021

AUGUST RECESS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

JCPA

JEWISH COUNCIL
FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

August Advocacy: An Overview	3
In-District Meetings	4
How to Deal with Agreement or Opposition	7
Issue Briefs	9
• John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act	
• Bipartisan Sentencing Reform	
• Interfaith Priorities for Recovery Bill	

THE JEWISH COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS (JCPA) is the hub of the Jewish community relations network. We advise and support the field by convening the Jewish community to deliberate key issues, and identify and develop policies, strategies, and programs for our network. The JCPA has an unparalleled capacity to mobilize grassroots activism through our network of 16 national and 125 local member agencies. Our policy team serves as a resource for our network and helps the community relations field express the consensus policy views to national leaders and influentials.

August Advocacy: An Overview

In August, most Members of Congress schedule in-district meetings in their home states while Congress is in recess. This is an important opportunity for Jewish community relations councils (JCRCs) to advocate on priority issues with members of Congress. JCPA developed this toolkit, with tips and talking points, to assist you in preparing for these meetings.

2021 Congressional Recess Timeline

Senate Recess: August 9 (Tentative) – September 6

House Recess: Present – September 20

Summary of Key Messages on Priority Issues

This year we suggest prioritizing the following issues that are currently before Congress for consideration:

John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act

Support the swift passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would reverse the Supreme Court's harmful *Shelby County v. Holder* ruling, create a new preclearance formula based on recent evidence of discrimination, and help protect the right to vote for communities of color across the nation.

Bipartisan Sentencing Reform

Enact robust sentencing reform that reduces harsh mandatory minimums and grants judges greater discretion by passing the First Step Implementation Act (S. 1014/ H.R. 3510), Covid Safer Detention Act (S. 312/ H.R. 3669), and the Prohibiting Punishment of Acquitted Conduct Act (S. 601/s 1621) no later than October.

Interfaith Priorities for Recovery Bill

The national Washington Interreligious Staff Community, a network with over 70 national religious organizations and denominations from a variety of different faiths of which JCPA is an active member, has come together to urge Congress to consider bold legislation that will bring about a just, sustainable, and inclusive recovery, one that addresses the systemic issues and racial injustices laid bare by the pandemic.

- Support basic human needs and allow all individuals to live with dignity
- Commit to adequate funding of the federal government's trust and treaty responsibilities to tribal nations
- Close the Medicaid Health Gap and strengthen access to quality, affordable health care:
- Address the climate crisis with an emphasis on environmental justice
- Invest in global and domestic manufacturing to produce enough vaccines to end the COVID-19 pandemic

Jewish Federations of North American (JFNA) Priorities

We encourage you to ask your delegation to support any or all of the federation priorities, outlined in their recent August Recess Memo, which you can access by [clicking here](#).

In-District Meetings

Tips for Making a Personal Visit to a Legislator

- Call the legislator's office to make an appointment.
- Follow the scheduler's instructions for requesting a meeting. This may include an email request. Be sure to include the number of people participating and what issues you want to discuss.
- Confirm the appointment a day or two prior to your meeting.
- Don't be disappointed if your meeting is with a staff person. There is great value in educating and building a relationship with the key staff people on your issues — they play a vital role in decision-making in the legislative process.
- Prepare information about your organization and a one-pager outlining each policy position you are discussing to share with the policymaker or staffer. You can find prepared one-pagers in the Issue Briefs section.

Preparing for the Meeting

An effective visit should include the following components:

- A clear statement about your organization and why you are there.
- An explanation of the issue(s) and what you want the decisionmaker to do about it.
- One or more personal stories illustrating why the issue is important to you and your community. *This may be a great opportunity, depending on your legislator's orientation, to discuss your views as a person of faith.*
- A request for a commitment: "will you support/oppose this proposal?"
- A thank you letter.

Assigning Roles

It is important to prepare for your meeting ahead of time by assigning roles and agreeing to time allotments. Considering that you have a limited timeframe for your meeting, it is important to stay focused and to ensure that you cover your full agenda. If you have a small group, give everyone an opportunity to present. If you have a larger group, ensure that you identify speakers. We suggest meeting beforehand to set the agenda and script. Inform your delegation on the position of the legislator that you are meeting with and what you are asking of them.

Leader: Confirms meeting time and location. Introduces the group and the Jewish Community Relations Council and JCPA briefly. Keeps time and ensures that the visit is on track, and that everyone has a chance to speak. Collects business cards from legislative staffer at the end and leaves the legislative leave-behind materials at the end.

Issue Presenter: Delivers the message, making it personal (by telling a story or sharing a personal experience), and speaks to why the legislator should act. Makes “the ask” and is prepared to respond depending on the legislator’s position. (See pages 7-8 for how to deal with different stances).

Social Media Reporter:

- Takes pictures of group during the visit.
- Tweets and shares the experience on Facebook after the visit.

Creating a Meeting Agenda

Opener:

- Express thanks for meeting with the delegation and collect business cards from staff.
- Introduce the group (individually, if a small group).
- Provide brief intro to the JCRC and JCPA: who we are, how many we represent.
- Tell why you are here: to introduce the issue(s) you’re advocating for today.
- Thank legislator for past support. A review of your legislator’s voting record should reveal a vote on a bill or cosponsorship of legislation that you appreciate (www.congress.gov/members).

Issue Presentation:

- State the problem that must be addressed by policy change.
- State the policy solution and why JCPA/JCRCs support this position.
- Personal story: share your experiences or perspective.
- State “the ask,” what they can do (refer to “How to Deal with Agreement or Opposition” on pages 7 and 8).
- Wait for a response – be sure to listen!
- Offer to be a resource or to send additional information.

Wrap-up:

- Review comments, commitments, and follow-up requests for the issue.
- Thank legislator/staff for their time.
- Leave your business card and legislative materials.

After the Meeting

Thank You Letter: It is very important to email a thank you letter to the individual(s) with whom you met. In addition to saying thank you, it should include a written reminder of what took place at the meeting, any action you are asking the legislator to take and, if relevant, their commitment to cosponsor, support, or oppose a specific piece of legislation.

Debrief and Meeting Report: After your visit, it is important to debrief about the meeting and to follow up with any requests for additional information made by the congressional office. We also recommend writing a brief summary of what took place that includes the following:

- Date, time, and name of person with whom you met.
- Questions asked by the legislator or staff person.
- Follow-up materials or information requested by the legislator or staff person.
- Summary of the legislator's position and willingness to support your requests.

Keep this information for future reference, share it with your coalition partners, and email it to Tammy Gilden at tgilden@thejcpa.org.

How to Deal with Agreement or Opposition

What if the policymaker **STRONGLY AGREES** with my position?

- Thank the policymaker.
- **Ask the policymaker to take a leadership role on this issue:**
 - Make a public statement in support of this issue
 - Urge colleagues to support the issue
 - Pressure House or Senate Leadership to take up the issue and to educate undecided colleagues
- **Ask the policymaker's advice about talking with other policymakers**—whom to talk with, what arguments make the best case for the issue, and what media strategy will be most effective in gathering support for the policy.
- **Ask what information or constituency would be helpful in swaying additional policymakers** to your position. Then work to produce these materials or advocates.
- Thank the policymaker again.

What if the policymaker **AGREES** with my position?

- Thank the policymaker.
- **Assure the policymaker of your continued interest in the issue and your continued support for the position they have taken.**
 - Ask if you can count on the policymaker to take more of a leadership role on the issue
 - Ask what the policymaker is currently doing to promote the issue and what the Jewish and broader faith community can do to help
 - Ask if the policymaker is aware of the proposed legislation related to the issue, and follow up with materials if necessary
- **Ask if the policymaker would be willing to help in any way beyond voting.** If yes, refer to the tips under **STRONGLY AGREES**.
- Thank the policymaker again.

What if the policymaker is **UNDECIDED** or **NONCOMMITTAL**?

- Thank the policymaker.
- **Inform the policymaker of your interest in the issue or legislation.**
- **Ask about the policymaker's viewpoint** to investigate whether his/her position arises from personal or political factors, a lack of information, misinformation, or a combination of these factors. Adjust your strategy accordingly.

- **Present the case as clearly and concisely as possible.**
- **Ask if there are specific groups or individuals from whom the policymaker would like to hear on this issue.**
- **Offer to provide information that will help inform the policymaker about the issue.**
- **Thank the policymaker again for the opportunity to talk with them.**
- **Express thanks for their support or disappointment for nonsupport** once the policymaker has indicated a position.
- **Follow up by providing the information you promised** and/or that addresses the policymaker's reservations. Send a positive story from the Member's district and emphasize how individuals in the district would be helped by the proposed legislation.
- **Stay in touch to nurture the relationship with the policymaker.**

What if the policymaker is OPPOSED to my position?

- **Thank the policymaker for the opportunity to present your views.**
- **Determine how strong the policymaker's position is**, and upon what it is based. If the opposition is not vehement, it may be worth trying to change his/her position.
- **If the policymaker appears movable, present information that addresses his/her concerns.** Make sure that the policymaker hears from constituents who support your position. Strategize and present the case most likely to resonate with this particular policymaker.
- **Thank the policymaker again for the opportunity to present your views.**
- **Follow up by providing the information you promised** and/or that addresses the policymaker's reservations. Send a positive story from the Member's district and emphasize how individuals in the district would be helped by the proposed legislation.
- **Stay in touch to nurture the relationship with the policymaker.**

What if the policymaker is STRONGLY OPPOSED to my position?

- **Thank the policymaker for the opportunity to talk.**
- **Ask him/her not to lobby colleagues on the issue.**
- **Write and express your disappointment in the position and/or vote taken.** Don't expend your time and energy trying to move this particular policymaker.

Issue Briefs

The following section contains issue briefs with background information and topline messages along with more detailed information. These briefs can serve as talking points for your meetings and double as one-pagers that you can leave behind with legislators and/or their staff.

At the back of this booklet, you will find an Advocacy Report Form that can help you track the outcomes of your meetings and ensure adequate follow-up. We encourage you to share these with JCPA so that we can help advance our network's advocacy.

Support the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act

JCPA believes that the right to vote and participate in our democracy is a core American Jewish value—a civic and religious duty. The bedrock of our democratic process is the right of every eligible citizen to cast a ballot and have that ballot counted. Achieving a government that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of its people is possible only through maximum citizen participation in the electoral process.

In 2013, the Supreme Court struck down a critical Voting Rights Act provision that required states with a history of disenfranchising voters to obtain Department of Justice preclearance before changing voting laws or procedures. Since this ruling, many states have enacted – and are continuing to propose laws that suppress the vote, often through onerous voter identification laws and cutbacks to early voting, especially in low-income communities and communities of color.

JCPA urges Members of Congress to support the swift passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

- The Voting Rights Advancement Act would reverse the Supreme Court’s harmful *Shelby County v. Holder* ruling, create a new preclearance formula based on recent evidence of discrimination, and help protect the right to vote for communities of color across the nation.
- **The systematic disenfranchisement of key segments of the voting population challenges the integrity of the elections process and undermines our democracy.** Many states are enacting laws that suppress the vote, targeting low-income communities and communities of color. At this very moment, we are witnessing, around the country, over 43 states are moving to enact new voter suppression laws not seen since the Jim Crow era. This is both a civil rights and a racial justice issue – and a Jewish concern to its core.
- **The Voting Rights Act has always had bipartisan support.** Congress has reauthorized the Voting Rights Act several times under both Republican and Democratic administrations with near unanimous support. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would ensure that *all* Americans have the same opportunity to exercise their constitutional right to vote. Safeguarding democracy is not a partisan issue.

For more information, please contact Tammy Gilden, Associate Director of Policy, Advocacy, and Communications at the Jewish Council for Public affairs, at tgilden@thejcpa.org.

Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) is the national hub of 125 local Jewish community relations councils and 16 national Jewish agencies, including the four denominations of American Judaism. Together our network builds consensus on behalf of the entire Jewish community to promote a just and pluralistic American society, support Israel's peace and security, and advocate for human rights around the world.

Support Bipartisan Sentencing Reform

The suffering of millions at the hands of our unjust criminal legal system is one of the most pressing civil rights crises of our time. The United States has become the leading incarcerator in the world and our criminal justice system disproportionately targets and impacts people of color – Black people are five times as likely as whites to be incarcerated. Meaningful reform legislation must include robust sentencing reform that reduces harsh mandatory minimums and grants judges greater discretion. Mandatory minimums are the single largest factor in the growth of our prison population.

JCPA is advocating for three sentencing-related bills already approved in bipartisan votes by the Senate Judiciary Committee, where they were introduced jointly by the Chair and Ranking Republican, Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA). The bills now await consideration by the full Senate and need at least 10 Republican Senators to vote for them, and each is short by a handful of those votes. Accordingly, JCPA and its partners are seeking further Republican Senate support and pushing Senate leadership to maintain the plan to move these bills no later than October.

We urge Members of Congress to cosponsor and support the passage of the First Step Implementation Act (S. 1014/ H.R. 3510), Covid Safer Detention Act (S. 312/ H.R. 3669), and the Prohibiting Punishment of Acquitted Conduct Act (S. 601/H.R. 1621) no later than October.

- **The First Step Implementation Act would retroactively apply major sentencing reforms from the First Step Act of 2018 and provide judges in future cases increased discretion to give sentences below mandatory minimums.** The bill would also implement major reforms for people sentenced as youth, including the opportunity to have lengthy sentences reconsidered.
- **The Covid Safer Detention Act would make clarifications and technical improvements to the federal Elderly Home Detention Pilot program and compassionate release process.** The bill would provide eligibility in these programs to additional vulnerable, low-risk incarcerated people and expedite releases from federal prison through these programs during the COVID 19 pandemic. It is intended to be to expand the number of people who can benefit from earlier release from federal prisons during the pandemic.
- **The Prohibiting Punishment of Acquitted Conduct Act would end the practice of judges increasing sentences based on conduct for which a person has been acquitted.** This practice is unfortunately common, even though it appears to “convict” a person for a crime for which that person was already acquitted. The bill would also allow a prior acquittal to be used as mitigation in sentencing for some other conviction.

For more information, please contact Tammy Gilden, Associate Director of Policy, Advocacy, and Communications at the Jewish Council for Public affairs, at tgilden@thejcpa.org.

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Interfaith Priorities for Recovery Bill

As a member of the national Washington Interreligious Staff Community, a network with over 70 national religious organizations and denominations from a variety of different faiths of which JCPA is an active member. This coalition has come together to offer the following policy recommendations for the recovery package.

As we emerge from the depths of the COVID crisis and the economic fallout, we urge you to consider bold legislation that will bring about a just, sustainable, and inclusive recovery, one that addresses the systemic issues and racial injustices laid bare by the pandemic. Now is the time to go bold, an opportunity to enact recovery legislation like this comes once in a generation. While we don't all have specific policies on every recommendation listed, we come together to call for a bold recovery package and the specific policies from our various working groups

We urge you to prioritize the following as you develop recovery legislation:

Support basic human needs and allow all individuals to live with dignity:

- Make permanent the expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit from the American Rescue Plan. This could cut childhood poverty by nearly 50% and provide greater equity in the tax code.
- Institute a national, permanent family and medical paid leave program and create affordable childcare.
- Expand housing choice vouchers so that all households eligible for assistance receive support.
- Expand the summer EBT program to all eligible children to prevent spikes in hunger during the summer months when kids aren't in school.
- Lift the ban on SNAP and TANF for people with drug felony convictions.
- Make high-speed internet accessible, affordable, and nationwide, especially in rural areas.

Commit to adequate funding of the federal government's trust and treaty responsibilities to tribal nations:

- Despite how the pandemic has disproportionately impacted Indian Country, tribal nations only received .5 percent of the \$2 trillion in the CARES Act and only .4 percent of the \$900 billion in the Consolidated Appropriations Act.
- Invest in infrastructure on tribal lands. Lack of access to electricity, running water, and broadband persists for many tribal families.

Close the Medicaid Health Gap and strengthen access to quality, affordable health care:

- Close the Medicaid Coverage Gap in Non-Expansion States by providing coverage for the first time to 2.2 million people living below the poverty line in the 12 states.

- Require state Medicaid programs to cover incarcerated individuals 30 days before release to ensure better care transitions.
- Make all lawfully present immigrants eligible for Medicaid and CHIP.
- Close the Gap in Medicaid Funding to the U.S. territories.

Address the climate crisis with an emphasis on environmental justice:

- Big and bold investments in clean, renewable energy to modernize our electric grid; in electric vehicles, charging infrastructure and incentives and upgrading and expanding public transit to electrify transportation and connect communities; in energy, efficiency and affordable energy-efficient housing to help people stay in their homes and help those in need, access safe and affordable housing.
- Pass a national Clean Energy Standard that achieves 100% renewable, pollution-free electricity by 2035, while also expanding investments in wind and solar power.
- Invest in lead pipe remediation and drinking water and wastewater infrastructure to ensure clean water for all.
- Direct at least 40% of the investments to BIPOC and low-income communities that have been forced to bear an unequal burden of pollution and the pandemic.

Invest in global and domestic manufacturing to produce enough vaccines to end the COVID-19 pandemic:

- \$25 billion for the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority to retrofit and build necessary vaccine production lines, to facilitate sharing of technology, and to fund the purchase of input materials to produce 8 billion vaccine doses needed to reach 4 billion people, especially in low- and middle-income countries. This money would support both domestic and regional facilities around the world. “

Advocacy Report Form

NAME: _____

COMMUNITY: _____

MEMBER OF CONGRESS (OR STAFF) MET WITH: _____

ISSUE(S) DISCUSSED:

HOW DID THE LEGISLATOR RESPOND TO YOUR REQUEST FOR SUPPORT?

DID THE LEGISLATOR NEED MORE INFORMATION ON ANY ISSUE OR REQUEST
ADDITIONAL FOLLOW-UP?

Please return this form to Tammy Gilden at tgilden@thejcpa.org

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