

# Engaging in Congressional Town Halls

**In-person, virtual or telephone town halls** are opportunities to build relationships with your members of Congress and learn more about their focus issues. These events are also an avenue to share your concerns. Asking questions at town halls and in other forums allows elected officials to hear from their constituents about key issues that impact our human family around the world.

**Use these tips and sample prompts to help guide how you can engage in congressional events.**

## Before events

- Follow your congressional members' social media accounts and sign up for their email lists so you know when these events are happening. As you establish relationships with your members of Congress, they will start inviting you to forums and events they host for constituents.
- Prepare how you will introduce yourself and ask your question if given the opportunity. Your introduction should summarize your role in your community and as a constituent and include why the issue matters to you. Keep your remarks concise as there may be a time limit. Examples of a possible introduction and question can be found at the end of this resource.
- Leverage your network by sharing information about the meeting with other advocates, partners and coalitions. More people sharing about the same issue will have a bigger impact.
- For virtual events, find a spot that is free from distractions, is quiet and has a good internet signal. Your background should be clean and simple. Avoid sitting with a window or light source behind you, as that can make it challenging to see.
- Whether in-person or virtual, dress appropriately. Remember that you are representing yourself, your community and Catholic Relief Services.
- Arrive early and learn the process to ask questions. If the meeting is online, join 15 minutes before it is scheduled to begin and make sure your audio and video are working well.

## During events

- For in-person events, sit near a microphone so you can easily move to it when it is time to ask questions.
- Make your remarks and question concise and clear. Congressional staff often screen constituents on the phone or in the crowd by having you share your question with them before they invite you to participate in the event.
- Share a story to demonstrate the importance of the issue, why it matters to you and to contextualize your question.
- Ask open-ended questions that require the congressional member to talk about the steps they will take to address the issue.
- Once the town hall is over, don't leave right away. Stay and introduce yourself to staff members and ask additional questions. Provide written copies of your statement to policymakers, their staff and the press.

## After events

- Thank your member of Congress for the opportunity to hear from them and share your voice by posting on social media and tagging them. Call your congressional member's office or send an email or note after the event to thank them.
- Follow up with them by scheduling a meeting to further discuss what they shared at the event and continue to move your issue forward.

## Sample introduction

*Thank you for holding this forum. My name is [X] and I am your constituent living in [city]. I am a [share about yourself, what you do and communities you are a part of]. With the COVID-19 pandemic threatening us all, I am especially concerned about the families living in extreme poverty around the world who are most vulnerable to the impacts of the virus. With little or no access to health care services, clean water or opportunities for work given restrictions, the consequences could be catastrophic. Foreign assistance is imperative to ensure the safety of these communities and our own, because to end the pandemic anywhere, we must stop it everywhere. One story stands out to me about the importance of why it is critical the U.S. be a global leader in addressing global poverty [...]*

## Sample question

**Federal budget and appropriations:** *How will you work with your colleagues in the [House/Senate] to ensure that poverty-reducing international and development assistance is protected and increased in this fiscal year's appropriations?*

