

## In-District Toolkit for NJJN Members

### RESOURCES TO HELP YOU CONNECT WITH YOUR CONGRESSIONAL MEMBER IN THEIR HOME DISTRICT

Summer 2017

This summer is a crucial time to make your voice heard with your members of Congress. Congress is closer than it has been in years to passing the [Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Act \(JJDP A\)](#) — it just needs that extra push to get it over the finish line. At the same time, federal funding for juvenile justice is in jeopardy and advocacy is needed to ensure that your state and its youth will have the federal resources necessary to make positive reforms.

We urge you to meet with your congressional delegation while they are back in their home offices this month so they can hear directly from you regarding the needs in your community and why they should prioritize youth justice. Below you will find detailed information on why it is important to advocate now for passage of the JJDP A and federal funding for youth justice and how to contact your members.

#### Why is the JJDP A Important?

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- The JJDP A has not been reauthorized since 2002 and expired in 2007. **We are closer than we have been in a long time to passage and your voice can make the difference!**
- First signed into law by President Gerald Ford in 1974, the JJDP A is the only federal statute that sets out **national standards for the safe care and equitable treatment of youth** in the juvenile justice system and provides direction and support for state juvenile justice system improvements.
- The House and Senate reauthorization bills strengthen and update the federal standards in the JJDP A to take into account some of the new research and innovations in the field of juvenile justice in areas such as adolescent brain development, trauma, and community-based programming.
- The **JJDP A provides vital funding to states** to support improved juvenile justice practices and safeguards for youth, families, and communities. Over the past ten years, federal funding

through the **JJDPAs** has been cut drastically – down over 50% since 2002. It will be hard to continue to just keep the line on federal funding if a new bill is not authorized soon.

### ***Where are We Now?***

- For the first time in many years, **both the House and Senate passed JJDPAs reauthorization bills** and they were passed with overwhelming bipartisan support. The Senate passed [S. 860](#) by unanimous consent on Aug. 1<sup>st</sup>. It was sponsored by Sen. Judiciary Chairman Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI). The House passed similar legislation, [H.R. 1809](#), on May 24<sup>th</sup>, sponsored by Rep. Jason Lewis (R-MN), with key support from Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA).
- Both bills are similar and strengthen the JJDPAs in a number of important ways, such as phasing out the shackling of pregnant girls in detention and encouraging alternatives to detention.
- But there are differences in the two bills. **A key difference concerns incarcerating young people for status offenses** – behaviors such as running away from home or skipping school, that would not be crimes if they were adults. The House bill would phase out the current “valid court order” exception to the prohibition on incarcerating these young people. A similar provision was removed from the Senate bill following an objection from one Senator, Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR).

### ***What Action Needs to be Taken?***

- The differences in the two bills will have to be resolved by the House and Senate before they can approve a joint a version of the bill and send it to the President. Urge your members of Congress to:
  - **support a reauthorization of the JJDPAs that includes the phaseout of the valid court order exception; and**
  - **push for approval of the JJDPAs reauthorization bill as soon as they get back to Washington in the fall. It is important that it be signed into law before funding decisions are made.**

## **Why Do Federal Appropriations Matter?**

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Federal investments support the development, implementation and sustainability of optimal juvenile justice and delinquency prevention systems and practices in all of the U.S. states, territories, and the District of Columbia, as well as in local jurisdictions. The three main federal funding sources for juvenile justice delinquency and prevention pursuant to the JJDPAs are: [Title II State Formula Grants; the Title V Local Delinquency Prevention Program; and the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant \(JABG\)](#).

Since Fiscal Year 2002, federal investments in programs that prevent and reduce delinquency have [decreased by over 50%](#). The Juvenile Accountability Block Grant program was completely stripped of funding several years ago. These federal cuts mean that fewer youth will have access to services designed to keep them from offending and penetrating deeper into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Jailing young people costs states and local governments as much as [\\$21 billion annually](#).

### **Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2018**

Congress must approve federal spending for discretionary programs, including juvenile justice funding for state programs, before the new fiscal year starts on Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. The Administration's proposal would provide \$58 million for Title II grants and \$17 million for Title V grants. These are slight increase in current funding — Title II is currently funded at \$55 million and Title V at \$14.5 million.

#### Senate

- On July 27, 2017, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved their [Fiscal Year 2018 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations bill](#) which would increase funding for Title II grants to \$60 million and for Title V grants to \$19 million. It did not provide funding for the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant program.

#### House

- On July 13, 2017, the U.S. House Appropriations Committee approved their [Fiscal Year 2018 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations bill](#) by a vote of 31 to 21. This bill **zeroes out funding for Title II and Title V of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP)** and continues the lack of funding for the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant.

**The House has zeroed out funding for the JJDP for the third year in a row.** It is critical that Members of Congress hear from you about the importance of maintaining and increasing federal funding for juvenile justice programs and services, at least at the level that the Senate Appropriations Committee approved.

## **Your Congressional Members Are in Their Home Districts Now**

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House and Senate members are now in their home districts and will be there until Sept. 5th. They will also be back in their home districts during the following times in the fall:

**House:** Sept. 15 -22; Oct. 16 - 20

**Senate:** Oct. 9 - 13

**Congressional representatives need to hear from you that JJDP matters and passage should be a priority and that appropriate funding for juvenile justice is essential.** We have tools below to help you make this happen.

## In-District Meetings: Visits with Your Congressional Member in their Home District

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### Which congressional member should you contact?

- Strong support from congressional members in the House and the Senate is needed to get the JJDPa passed and funded so the best idea is to try to get appointments with all three members of your Senate and House delegation. In addition to advocating for the JJDPa and juvenile justice funding, meeting with them is a way to forge a relationship with their office.
- It may take a while to get a meeting so it is best to start working on it as soon as possible.
- If you are not able to meet with all of your delegation, then feel free to contact Melissa Goemann ([goemann@njjn.org](mailto:goemann@njjn.org)) to determine which member is the highest priority.

### Making an appointment

- To make an appointment contact the appointment scheduler in your district by phone or email. If you don't know your Senators or Representatives, you can use the zip-code finder here: <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members>. This site will provide you with a direct link to your member's webpage, where you can find contact information for their district office, and it also provides additional information about the member generally, including committee membership and leadership positions.
- When contacting the district office, direct your request to the attention of the scheduler, let them know what issues you would like to speak to the member about (JJDPa and juvenile justice funding), and identify yourself as a constituent. You should also include specific dates and times that you are available to meet. If the member is unavailable, ask to meet with the legislative staff member handling juvenile justice issues. If you do not hear back from the scheduler, be sure to call the office to follow up.
- Personal stories can help legislators to more effectively connect with an issue and make your visit more impactful. For those groups that work with youth or family members, their voices are of the utmost importance. If needed, provide this information to the members of your coalition that would like to share their experiences with your congressional delegation or consider scheduling a visit together if they would prefer.

### Preparation for the meeting

- Know the basics about your member of Congress, such as their party affiliation, whether they are on any of the relevant committees for your issue, and if they are in any leadership positions.
- Any other information you have regarding your member, including how they have voted on your issue and personal information, such as their outside interests, career path, and other issues of importance to them is also helpful. Try to identify areas of interest that you may have in common and/or that are relevant to your issue.

- Be clear on what the request is, or “ask,” that you are making of your member and prepare talking points that will support this request. If you have materials that you can leave behind, such as a fact sheet, that is also helpful. We have resources below to help you with all of this.

### Asks during the meeting

- Be specific – ask your member of Congress to:
  - Prioritize a vote on JJDPa reauthorization as soon as they get back to Washington in the fall. It is important that it be signed into law before funding decisions are made.
  - Support including the phaseout of the valid court order exception in the JJDPa reauthorization bill.
  - Fight for full and adequate funding of the JJDPa – at least at the Senate appropriations bill levels.
- Members of Congress primarily focus on the issues that are close to home. Talk about why JJDPa reauthorization and funding is important to you and your organization and link this to specific programs in your state and congressional district if possible.
- Anecdotes about programs that are effective – or that need more resources, can also be helpful and could be discussed by you or a youth or family member that accompanies you.
- Leave behind a JJDPa fact sheet and funding chart (which can be found below) and any information you have about state or local programs impacted by the JJDPa and federal juvenile justice dollars. Funding fact sheets for some states have been prepared by Act4JJ and can be found here: <http://www.juvjustice.org/114th-congress>.

### Follow Up

- After the meeting, be sure to email a thank you letter to the member of Congress or staff person with whom you met.
- The thank you letter should restate the points you went over in the meeting and should provide any additional information that was requested or that you promised during the meeting.
- If the member made a commitment when you met, be sure to gratefully acknowledge this promise in your thank you letter.

## Resources

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For further information on the JJDPa and in-district meetings in general, see the following resources:

- SparkAction’s [JJDPa Action Center](#) action alerts and other resources.
- The [Act 4 Juvenile Justice \(Act4JJ\) website](#).<sup>1\*</sup>

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<sup>1\*</sup> Act4JJ is a campaign of the [National Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition](#), which is composed of organizations advocating for the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPa) and increased federal funding for juvenile justice programs and services.

- The Freepress website has additional helpful and generic [In-District Meeting FAQs](#).

It is helpful when meeting with members of Congress to have materials you can share to help them learn more about your issue area. Below are materials from NJJN and from the Act 4 Juvenile Justice Coalition that you can provide to members and staff at your meetings or send as a follow up measure.

- [Reauthorize the JJDPa fact sheet](#): This sheet explains the basics of what the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act is and why it must be reauthorized.
- [Federal Policy Priorities](#): This sheet details NJJN's federal juvenile justice policy priorities for the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress.
- [Juvenile Justice Federal Funding Chart](#): This resource looks at federal juvenile justice appropriations and how they have changed since 2002, the last year in which the JJDPa was reauthorized.

## Questions?

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Please contact Melissa Goemann at [goemann@njjn.org](mailto:goemann@njjn.org), if you have any questions or need assistance.