

## Blueprint Step 1: Understanding Your Audience

### **Who are my members of Congress and what do they do?**

The U.S. Congress is the national decision-making body of the United States and includes the House of Representatives and Senate. Every person is represented by three members of Congress: one representative who reflects the interests of your community and two senators who reflect the interests of your state in Congress.

The main role of Congress and its members is to pass laws that apply to the entire country. When it comes to gun violence prevention, there are many types of laws that impact school and community safety, including laws that prevent kids from gaining access to guns, laws that strengthen the background check process to ensure guns don't end up in the wrong hands, and laws helping or requiring people store their firearms securely, among many others.

It is possible that at least one of your members of Congress might have a unique influence over, or strong interest in, school safety. For example, they may have personally experienced gun violence or have a child or grandchild whose safety they worry about. They may also be assigned to one of the committees that makes these key decisions on school safety: the Senate or House Judiciary Committee and sometimes the education committees.

### **How can I work with my members of Congress to improve school safety?**

It is important to remember that perspectives and positions on gun violence prevention vary. It's always worthwhile to do some research prior to reaching out to your members of Congress, starting with their website and/or [Congress.gov/Members](https://www.congress.gov/members) to better understand their perspective and background on school safety issues. Know that you may have to work with your elected officials to find areas of consensus. For example, some may be willing to support background checks while some may be willing to support bans on assault weapons, others may only be willing to support firearm safety education. Regardless, when it comes to school safety and your members of Congress, it is their job to pass and update laws that keep everyone in school communities safe. And it is their job to listen to you, to hear your concerns and to represent the interests of you and your community in Congress.

A conversation about school safety with your members of Congress and/or their staff is a great place to start. If this is your first time discussing school safety with your members of Congress and/or their staff, consider starting with an introductory one-on-one call or meeting to explain PTA's role in the community and get a basic understanding of all they currently do and are willing to do in the future to promote school safety. Building a long-term relationship with the office is essential as advocacy is not as effective in a single meeting. Focus on relating to your members of Congress by sharing your personal story and how gun violence impacts your community.

# Blueprint for Working with Members of Congress to Improve School Safety

Write here what you have learned about your members of Congress

*For example, do you share anything in common with them? Do they serve on any committee or sponsor any school safety legislation? Have they express support for any particular solutions to gun violence and school safety?*

Write here why school safety is important to you

*For example, what story or experience do you want to make sure to tell and make sure that your members of Congress know?*

## Blueprint Step 2: Preparing for Your Conversation

### **Who should be at this meeting?**

When you're ready to facilitate a meeting with your members of Congress or their staff, reach out to them by finding their contact information on their website and calling their office/staff to schedule a meeting. While most offices do have contact forms on their website, it is sometimes the fastest to call directly. Every member of Congress has district offices in your area and many offices are willing to meet virtually if traveling is not an option. This is a good time to remember to be flexible as meeting times may change due to ever-changing congressional schedules. Consider also inviting others in your school community to join the meeting, such as other concerned parents/guardians, students or teachers. A more inclusive group will not only emphasize the importance of school safety across the community, but it will also show your members of Congress that your community is willing to work together on these issues.

### **What topics do we want to discuss at this meeting?**

Prepare and send an agenda to the participants prior to the meeting. A customizable agenda template is provided below, but ideally the agenda should include topics for discussion and questions you have for your members of Congress related to school safety. One topic of conversation could be legislation. You can learn more about what legislation National PTA endorses at [PTA.org/Advocacy](https://www.pta.org/Advocacy) under Key Legislation and what safety measures your members of Congress support on their website or [Congress.gov/Members](https://www.congress.gov/Members). It may take some time to find areas of consensus with your elected officials, but doing the research ahead of time and having specific bill names and numbers to discuss will guarantee the office takes note of your concerns and gives you an opportunity to follow-up after the meeting.

Is this your first time meeting with a member of Congress? It's okay to be nervous! Remember that you will never need to be an expert on gun violence prevention. The biggest impact you can make is by sharing your personal story. There are more advocacy resources at [PTA.org](https://www.pta.org) to get your journey started.

# Blueprint for Working with Members of Congress to Improve School Safety

Write here who you will be meeting with and logistical details

Write here the topics you plan to discuss with your members of Congress and how they relate to your community

## Blueprint Step 3: Discussion and Further Action

**Remember this conversation is an opportunity to provide feedback, ask questions and build a relationship with your members of Congress around school safety.** Take notes, ask questions, listen closely and commit to continued conversation, collaboration and action alongside your members of Congress and their staff.

There are many ways you can collaborate with your members of Congress beyond this initial conversation on school safety. Consider these action items to discuss during your meeting and to pursue as follow up action:

- **Ask your member of Congress to co-sponsor a bill.** You can learn more about what legislation National PTA endorses on [PTA.org/Advocacy](https://www.pta.org/Advocacy) under Key Legislation.
- **Ask your members of Congress to support federal funding** that addresses school safety needs.
- **Schedule another meeting** to perhaps bring in more families or other stakeholders from the school community or other important voices, like students.
- **Invite your members of Congress to speak at a PTA meeting or another event** to share their perspectives on school safety issues as well as elicit feedback from families and answer their questions.
- **Ask your members of Congress to highlight their school safety efforts in their regular communications with constituents.** Offer to help gather resources to share in those communications.

Remember to send a follow-up email thanking your members of Congress and their staff for their time and reiterating any next steps that were discussed in the meeting. We also highly recommend you take a photo during your meeting and post to social media, tagging your members of Congress and National PTA so the conversation can continue after the meeting.

# Blueprint for Working with Members of Congress to Improve School Safety

Write here your notes from the meeting

Write here the next steps and follow up for after the meeting

## Sample Meeting Agenda

- **Introductions.** *Briefly describe who is in attendance and what is their role and relationship to the school or the congressional district. Explain how those in your group relate to the member of Congress and their staff. This is also a good opportunity to highlight your PTA's presence in the community, especially if you have many members or represent many communities.*
- **Personal Story.** *Have one or two people in your group explain why the issue of school safety is important to them and/or share a brief (1-2 minute) story about their experience with this issue. Personal stories from constituents not only increase credibility but are often the most memorable and compelling for a congressional office and will underscore the importance of your requests later in the meeting.*
- **Acknowledgements.** *Take a moment to thank your member of Congress for anything they have done so far to support school safety, like co-sponsoring a bill or speaking out on the issue. This is also a good opportunity to acknowledge if they are on a committee that is important on these issues.*
- **Secure Storage.** *Do you support legislation to encourage gun owners to store their firearms securely and out of reach of children? Do you support holding adults accountable for using gun safes and other safety devices to prevent youth from obtaining and discharging a firearm?*
- **Background Checks.** *Are you in favor of universal background checks for anyone who purchases a firearm? Are you in favor of background checks for guns purchased via gun shows, private sales and online transactions? Are you willing to require that these background checks take a minimum of three business days? Do you support background checks that enable guns to be traced moving forward?*
- **Minimum Age Requirements.** *Are you in favor of raising the minimum age to 21 to purchase a firearm? Would you support legislation that revokes the federal firearm license for any dealer who knowingly sells to minors?*
- **Firearm Safety Education.** *Would you be willing to support education programs to teach students, parents and community members about firearm safety and violence prevention?*

# Blueprint for Working with Members of Congress to Improve School Safety

- **Mental Health Supports and Services.** *Do you intend to increase school funding to provide wrap-around services for students who are at risk of harming themselves or others? For students who have brought a firearm to school? Do you support federal funding for school-based mental health services? For communities and victims who have experienced firearm violence?*
- **Restricting Specific Weapons and Accessories.** *Are you willing to support a ban on bump stocks? Military-style semi-automatic assault weapons? Large-capacity ammunition magazines? Online sales of kits that can be used to make or modify guns? Are you willing to tighten enforcement on straw purchases of weapons and limit how many guns can be purchased in a month?*
- **Extreme Risk (also known as “Red Flag”) Laws.** *Do you support letting judges temporarily block gun access for people who pose a serious risk to themselves or others?*
- **School Climate and Student Support Services.** *What role do you see school climate and student discipline playing in school safety? Do you support restorative justice, positive school discipline and alternative dispute resolution techniques over the detention, exclusion or incarceration of youth?*
- **Physical Safety.** *Do you support increasing the physical security of school buildings? How do you aim to do this without undermining the school environment or causing psychological harm through ineffective trainings, lock downs or responses to false threats of violence? What measures specifically do you support to protect schools from firearm related and other forms of violence?*
- **Federal Funding.** *Do you support increasing funding to incentivize and support family engagement and education initiatives? Are you willing to provide more federal funding for comprehensive research of the causes and effects of gun violence? Where do you stand on funding Title IV-A, which supports safe and healthy students through comprehensive school mental health programs, drug and violence prevention programs, training on trauma-informed practices, and other health and physical education programs?*
- **Next Steps and Thank You.** *Ask if the member of Congress is willing to continue this conversation. If they committed to supporting specific actions, ask how you can help them. Be sure to take a photo and post to social media tagging and thanking your member of Congress. In the days following the meeting, send a follow-up email thanking them for their time and reiterating next steps; include resources relevant to the discussion.*



## Resources

*Below are examples of available tools and resources for parent leaders and members of Congress to use when working on school safety issues.*

- [National PTA Endorsed Legislation](#): National PTA has identified current legislation related to school safety, student well-being and education. The legislation listed has been officially endorsed by National PTA and can be good to mention when urging your members of Congress to support specific bills regarding school safety.
- [How a Bill Becomes a Law](#): National PTA has outlined the steps of how a bill becomes a law. This resource includes definitions of terms used throughout the process, including what happens when a bill is introduced on the Congressional floor and what happens when it is referred to Congressional Committee.
- [Conducting Meetings with a Decisionmaker](#): National PTA has outlined important tips to help you have an effective meeting with a member of Congress. These helpful tips are for three parts of the meeting: 1) how to prepare for the meeting, 2) tips for during the meeting, and 3) tips for after the meeting.
- [Corresponding with Members of Congress](#): National PTA provides guidance on how to contact and communicate with members of Congress through either email, a phone call or a letter. This resource also has sample letters and phone conversations for individuals to model off, if preferred.
- [The Federal Appropriations and Budget Process](#): National PTA has outlined how the federal appropriations and budget process works. This resource also includes a YouTube video to help explain these two processes more in depth, if you would like further information.
- [Congressional Flow THRIVE Course](#): This resource offered by National PTA helps guide families, parents and guardians when conducting a congressional meeting.
- [SchoolSafety.gov](#): This is the federal government's main website for school safety information, including updates on the latest news within school safety and a section with multiple school safety topics such as cyberbullying, bullying and mental health with links to additional resources within each of these topics. This site also includes information on upcoming grants and events on a variety of topics within school safety.

## Checklist for Working with Members of Congress on School Safety

- Review** the publicly available school safety information (see Blueprint Step 1).
- Identify** your members of Congress using [this helpful tool from PTA](#).
- Develop** a long-term, trust-based relationship with your members of Congress (see Blueprint Step 1).
- Schedule** a meeting with your members of Congress or their staff (see Blueprint Step 2).
- Draft** and send an agenda in advance of the meeting (see Blueprint Step 2).
- Assemble** a list of school safety related questions, concerns and requests (see Blueprint Step 2). If helpful, use the resources listed above.
- Meet** with your members of Congress or their staff (see Blueprint Step 3 and [PTA's helpful tool](#)).
- Commit** to next steps with your members of Congress and their staff (see Blueprint Step 3).