Step One: Send an Email

Scheduling a meeting with a member of Congress during a district work period should always start with an email to the district scheduler. It’s important to make sure the email includes all relevant information: who you are; why the member should meet with you; when you are available and at which of the member’s offices you would like the meeting to take place, if applicable. Below is a draft email for you to tailor with relevant details.

SUBJ: Meeting Request to Discuss the Impact of Sequestration on Federal Defenders

Dear [NAME OF SCHEDULER],

My name is [YOUR NAME] and I am [YOUR TITLE]. I am writing to request a meeting with [MEMBER NAME] while he is in [STATE] during the August work period. I am available to meet with [MEMBER NAME] on [DATES AVAILABLE] at [OFFICE PREFERANCE, IF APPLICABLE]. At this meeting, I will be joined by [NAMES AND TITLES OF MEETING PARTICIPANTS].

As you know, the impact of the federal budget sequestration has been widespread. The $350 million reduction in the federal judiciary’s budget has resulted in staggering cuts to our nation’s federal defenders, lawyers who are charged with representing clients who cannot afford to pay for their own legal counsel. Unfortunately, these cuts have had the dual impact of weakening our justice system and actually costing taxpayers more money, because cases that would typically be handled by a federal defender are now being assigned to court-appointed private lawyers for whom the government must pay.

My colleagues and I look forward to meeting with [MEMBER NAME] to discuss how we can work together to ensure the next budget protects the justice system and doesn’t include cuts that actually increase government costs. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me at [YOUR PHONE NUMBER] or [YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS].

Best,
[YOUR NAME]

Step Two: Follow Up

After you’ve sent the initial email, wait a few days. If you haven’t heard back after two or three days, call the district scheduler directly to follow up. Make sure you have the dates you’re available and the names and titles of others who will be joining you at hand when you call. Below are some brief talking points you can use to explain the purpose of the meeting, if asked:

- Sequestration has had a staggering impact on our nation’s federal defenders.
- These cuts have had the dual impact of weakening our justice system and actually costing taxpayers more, not less.
• We would like to meet with [MEMBER NAME] to discuss how we can work together to ensure the next budget protects the justice system and doesn’t include cuts that actually increase government costs.

If you call the office and the district scheduler is unavailable, either ask when a better time to reach him or her would be, or leave a message. If you leave a message, forward your initial email to the scheduler and include a note saying you called to check on scheduling this meeting and that you look forward to hearing back soon.