



U.S. BLACK CHAMBERS, INC.

# ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



# President & CEO's Letter to Membership

**Dear members,**

I want to personally thank you for your dedication to our organization and its critical priorities. It is because of advocates and leaders like you, that our mission and successes have accelerated in the past year. The U.S. Black Chambers, Inc. (USBC) is pleased to share with you our advocacy toolkit, including resources to inform our valued members of our long-standing policy priorities and how to advance them at the state, local, and federal levels.

As the leading voice of Black businesses in America, USBC will continue to be a voice for advancing Black business, Black wealth, and racial economic justice and opportunities. As our community continues to disproportionately bear the burden of economic turbulence our mission and its importance have grown even stronger. This toolkit will help you understand the basics of advocacy so that you can leverage the importance of our five pillars of service: advocacy, access to capital, contracting, entrepreneurial training, and chamber development. These five pillars represent the core beliefs of USBC as we continue to push for progress on behalf of Black businesses and the Black community.

Your voice is our most powerful tool. As you advocate for the policies behind USBC to improve outcomes for Black businesses and communities across the nation, please know that your efforts do not go unnoticed. This toolkit will equip you with fundamental resources to pick up the phone and reach out through email to advocate that Congress pursue policies of racial economic justice and

for the benefit of our community. I've long said in order for there to be a strong America, there must be a strong Black America. In order for there to be a strong Black America, we need strong Black businesses. In order to have strong Black businesses, we need strong Black Chambers of Commerce that are committed to growing and supporting Black enterprises. I encourage every Black American and Black business leader to advocate across the board to work together with USBC to ensure that policymakers on both sides of the aisle are aware of and understand our outlined principles.

Thank you for your efforts, and we look forward to working with you, our partners and members, to advance the policy priorities outlined in this packet to strengthen Black America and the Black businesses that power its economy every day.



*Sincerely,*  
**Ron Busby, Sr.**  
*President & CEO*  
*U. S. Black Chambers, Inc.*



# Advocacy 101

**USBC encourages your organization to engage with your civic leaders in Washington and at the state and local levels.**

**Some interactions may take as little as a few moments and others will require preparation. This toolkit is designed to help members engage in basic advocacy giving you everything you need to *#GetInvolved*.**

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# Know Your Delegation

Understanding the leaders you are seeking to engage will frame the remainder of your advocacy strategy. Insert your address into the following website to locate your federal, state, and local representatives: [Please Click Here](#)

Once you find your representative, each policymaker will have a website with the locations and contact information for District/State offices as well as their Washington, D.C. office. Having this information saved and readily accessible will make your advocacy work easier as contacting your Members of Congress or state and local delegation is usually the first step. See below for an example from Maryland!

Here you can find your representatives, how to contact them, bills they've introduced, committees they serve on, and political contribution they've received.  
Enter your full address below to get started.

15800 Crabbs Branch Way, Rockville, MD, 20855

SUBMIT

VIEW ALL

FEDERAL

STATE

LOCAL

Displaying results for: **15800 Crabbs Branch Way, Rockville, MD, 20855** ([Change Your Address](#))

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**Joseph R. Biden (D)**

President of the United States

(202) 456-1111

See Details



**Kamala D. Harris (D)**

Vice President of the United States

(202) 456-1111

See Details



**Ben Cardin (D)**

US Senator

(202) 224-4524

See Details



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<p><b>Chris Van Hollen (D)</b> US Senator (202) 224-4654</p> <p>See Details →</p>	<p><b>Benjamin F. Kramer (D)</b> Lieutenant Governor of Maryland (202) 225-5341</p> <p>See Details →</p>	<p><b>Bonnie L. Cullison (D)</b> MD State Delegate (410) 974-3901</p> <p>See Details →</p>
<p><b>Wes Moore (D)</b> Governor of Maryland (410) 974-3901</p> <p>See Details →</p>	<p><b>Aruna Miller (D)</b> Lieutenant Governor of Maryland (410) 974-3901</p> <p>See Details →</p>	<p><b>Anthony G. Brown (D)</b> MD State Attorney General (410) 576-6300</p> <p>See Details →</p>
<p><b>Brooke S. Lieman (D)</b> MD State Comptroller (410) 260-7801</p> <p>See Details →</p>	<p><b>Benjamin F. Kramer (D)</b> Lieutenant Governor of Maryland (410) 841-3151</p> <p>See Details →</p>	<p><b>Bonnie L. Cullison (D)</b> MD State Delegate (410) 841-3883</p> <p>See Details →</p>

To find out if your state Congress is in session visit: <https://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites> then click on your state to see whether your state House of Representatives and state Senate are in session. It may take some investigating of the website you are redirected to.

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# Engaging With Your Legislator

## Tips and best practices for engaging on a state, federal, or local level

- ✔ Know the constituency, and the member's policy priorities and motivations.
- ✔ Come with policy solutions rather than an ask for their ideas.
- ✔ Seek out regulations and requirements in place for your organization or business as it relates to state and local advocacy before engaging with representatives. Requirements in place will vary on state and local levels, so be sure to not violate any rules of engagement when reaching out to representatives. For example, some non-profits may have restrictions on direct or indirect lobbying – be sure to consult an expert before reaching out to ensure you remain in compliance to local guidelines. Don't let this scare you – you can still engage with policymakers in ways that are educational in nature.
- ✔ Don't forget to share policy one-pagers, USBC collateral, or leave-behinds with more information about your organization or business.

## Attend Your Legislator's Events

An easy way to get to know policymakers is to attend events and town hall meetings hosted by them in your area. Elected officials are more accessible and less pressed for time when in their home state or district.

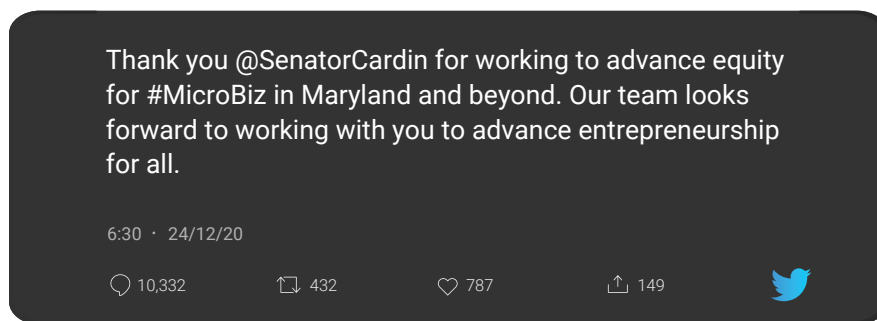
To find your legislator's next event, visit their website. Some Legislators have their upcoming events listed and since Coronavirus restrictions have limited some in-person meetings, many lawmakers have turned to virtual townhalls, making events even easier to attend. If they do not have these events listed, use the website to find the office's contact information and a staff scheduler will be able to provide it to you.

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## Engage in Social Media

Social media, including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, are important communications tools and policymakers utilize these platforms. Follow them, engage with their content, and promote your business or organization by interacting with these accounts in a positive way.

Social Media can also be used to interact or engage with your lawmakers directly to raise your team's visibility among our nation's policymakers. Below is an example of a tweet written for Senator Cardin (D-MD):



## Call Your Legislator

Calling your legislator's office is a good way to get your issues on their radar. Staff assistants take diligent notes of constituent calls and submit them in a report to your legislator. If you engage enough, your legislator will see your issue being raised. We recommend the following tips when calling your legislator:

- ✓ Locate their number from their website.
- ✓ Let them know you are a constituent (many legislators are more attentive to issues being raised by constituents).
- ✓ Thank them for their time, their work, and their support (if they support your issue area).
- ✓ Make a clear, concise, and brief case for the issue you are raising. Make sure to include a call to action (the solution you are seeking to propose or raise).
- ✓ Take note of their answer and thank the person for their time, and follow-up with your legislator to show you are paying attention and are invested in the issue.

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## Email Your Legislator

Emailing your legislator is a great way to get your issues heard if you are unable to meet with them directly. We recommend the following tips for emailing your legislator:

**Decipher the Staff Email Formula:** If a staff member is unable to give you their email address, ask for their name and apply it to the below formulas:

- **Standard House Email:** firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov
- **Standard Senate Email:** firstname\_lastname@memberlastname.senate.gov

**Use formally written language and formatting:** ensure you address your legislator properly, such as “The Honorable (legislator full name)” or, if they have a leadership role, address them with their proper title, such as “Mister Speaker Kevin McCarthy” or “Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.”

**Introduce yourself and make a connection back to your district:** any business data here will be extremely helpful in grabbing the attention of your legislator and their staff.

**Keep it concise:** aim to keep your letter or memo to one page, try to only discuss one issue or bill per letter/email. Ensure your arguments are well-thought-out and use bullet points to outline your message. Members and their staff have busy schedules, the shorter and more impactful, the better. Remind your legislator of your request: take note of how they vote on the issue so that you can follow-up with them to thank them or hold them accountable.

## Write a Letter to Your Legislator – Tips and Tricks

- ✓ Use your company letterhead with contact information included in the header/footer.
- ✓ Spell the legislator’s name correctly and ensure you’re using their highest title (if they hold a leadership position).
- ✓ Keep it concise (stick to one page).
- ✓ Personalize your letter with relevant data or impact reports.
- ✓ Include your signature and contact information.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for follow-up by requesting a meeting or to stay in touch.



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## Have a Private Meeting with Your Legislator or their Staff

Meeting with your Senators, Representatives, and/or staff, is a great way to advance our mission and message. Members of Congress and their staff are interested in learning what issues matter to their constituents and how they can support their communities.

## How to Schedule a Meeting – Member of Congress

Visit your Senators' and Representative's websites (house.gov or senate.gov). Many Members have a "Request a Meeting" option on their websites. Follow the listed protocol as it differs for each Member. If this option does not exist, reach out to your Member's District or Washington, D.C. office (listed on their websites). The office will direct you to the Member's scheduler or executive assistant who can schedule your meeting.

## How to Schedule a Meeting – Staff Member

Reach out to your Member's District or Washington, D.C. office to determine which staff member you should meet with – the office will know where to direct your inquiry. For example, if you want to talk about capital access for entrepreneurs, ask for the staffer who handles small business and entrepreneurship or workforce development issues. The relevant staff member is most likely to be knowledgeable about the programs that are important to USBC. If the staff member is unavailable to meet or speak over the phone, ask for the staff member's email address – they are more likely to get back to you via email. For email correspondence, refer to the "Emailing your legislator" section of this packet.

## How to Schedule a Virtual Meeting – Staff or Legislators

You will likely work through the legislator's staff to meet with other legislative staff and/or the Member. If your legislator or staff prefers to meet virtually, graciously accept the offer and keep in mind the following tips.

- ✔ Be sure to provide an agenda for the discussion, denoting any bills or topics you will be discussing. We recommend sending this around the day of the meeting, attaching any reports, one-pagers, impact numbers, or number of jobs your business contributes to the local economy, before the meeting and after as a follow-up.
- ✔ Confirm your virtual meeting a few days prior to the meeting to ensure that staff have marked their and/or their boss' calendar.
- ✔ Do not ask the staff to send a virtual meeting link or a calendar invitation (especially at the federal level), be respectful of their time and graciousness and help them out by creating a virtual meeting link and/or calendar invitation.

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- ✔ Use a professional background, less busy is always preferred. Design your home or office virtual background by keeping the following in mind:
    - Show your logo.
    - Remove any political references on book spines and/or posters.
    - Ensure that any children or pets do not make a surprise appearance or distraction.
    - Follow-up after the meeting with digital handouts including any reports, impact numbers, collateral you need the legislator to see. Thank them for their time.

## Insight & Tips

- ✔ Be sure to indicate that you are a constituent (your hometown or place of business) when engaging with Members of Congress that represent you.
- ✔ The Capitol Switchboard (202-224-3121) can connect you directly with the D.C.-based Congressional office you request.
- ✔ For in-person meetings, confirm your meeting with the staff member a few days before, as their schedules can get busy.

## Meeting with Staff or the Member?

Depending on the legislator and their schedules, taking into account factors such as whether they are in recess during your request, at their home districts if you are seeking federal engagement, or depending on their voting schedule or session schedule, your legislator may be unable to meet directly with you; if you are asked to meet with a staff member rather than the legislator, politely accept the meeting and approach that meeting as if it were the lawmaker.

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# Goals of your Meeting

**Introduction:** The goal of Congressional outreach is to amplify USBC's federal policy priorities (below) and explain why they are beneficial to you. We encourage members begin by introducing yourself, your business/organization, and USBC. This introduction should include USBC's key policy priorities and some talking points (we include key talking points in this packet).

**Know Your Mission:** Come prepared to talk about your company/organization. Talk about your locations, number of employees, your business successes and challenges. The more local and personal your story, the more it will resonate with Washington. Tie your experience to USBC's policy priorities listed below. Keep It Simple: Members will likely not know the ins and outs of our policy requests. Keep the overview broad and easy to digest and be sure to continue to tie back the conversation to the end user of the policy, the entrepreneur, or, your organization.

**Keep It Concise:** These meetings tend to be short – at most, 30-minutes in length. Know what you want to say and focus on one “ask.” Review our federal policy priorities and talking points and consider utilizing the points that speak directly to your organization. Framing: Ensure your message takes existing assumptions and experiences into account (ask: how will your audience interpret your message?); connect with your legislator's values and priorities and make sure to tie back the ask to the district.

**Framing:** Ensure your message takes existing assumptions and experiences into account (ask: how will your audience interpret your message?); connect with your legislator's values and priorities and make sure to tie back the ask to the district.

**Have Your Handouts:** Leave behind information about your organization, your policy priorities, and a copy of the USBC's key policy priorities. An organization one-pager will have additional information that staff will want to help them better understand your issues and the legislation you would like to see championed during this Congress.

**Take Notes:** Ensure that you take down key details of the meeting, such as identifying which staff member you spoke with, their follow-up information, your key asks, the staff member's prior stance on the issue, and the staff member's response to your meeting. These details will enable your organization to strategize the details of your next meeting. Be sure to note if the Member was in attendance for your follow-up message.

**Follow Up:** Following the meeting, be sure to send the appropriate thank you note along with any requested follow up items (e.g., information on your organization and your priorities).

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**What NOT to do during a meeting with your legislator's office:**

The following topics and activities are not acceptable during a meeting with your legislator or their staff members, not only are they not well- received, but some may even violate state/local or federal law and end up hurting the legislator in the future:

- Do not be late – your meeting may not take place if you miss your scheduled time
- Do not refuse to meet with a legislator's staff
- Do not veer from the issue at hand
- Do not push personal political ideology or agendas on the legislator or their staff, especially if it conflicts with the legislator's
- Do not make any mention of campaign contributions (for example, members are not allowed to discuss campaign finances in their federal offices)
- Do not comment or inquire on any inducements (such as speaking fees, meeting fees)
- Do not call the legislator by their first name unless the legislator explicitly requests that you do or unless you are already on a first-name basis
- Do not dress inappropriately, appropriate attire is business professional
- Most importantly, do not be afraid to meet with your legislator or their staff. Remember: your legislator works for you!

## Invite Your Legislator for a Visit

Whether you are an entrepreneur or an organization who supports entrepreneurship, inviting your legislator for a site visit or place of business is often more impactful than a meeting at the legislator's office. Legislators are more likely to gain interest in a site visit after the establishment of a relationship, such as following a meeting, conversation, or chain of correspondences with the legislator's office. Site visits enable legislators to learn about your organization, meet local community members and see the impact your organization has, sight on scene, enabling them to draw deeper connections to your organization and to keep your priorities in mind moving forward.

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# U.S. Black Chambers, Inc.

## 2023 Policy Priorities

To prepare for a meeting with your Congressional representatives, we encourage you to arm yourselves with USBC's federal policy priorities outlined below.

### ***Support Black Business Development***

- 1.** Ensure parity in access to capital by holding financial institutions accountable to addressing systemic racial biases, higher interest rates, and denial rates for Black firms.
- 2.** Foster Congressional support for the expansion of Black broadcast station ownership by implementing tax benefits to incentivize Black media ownership.
- 3.** Federal departments and agencies should direct federal advertising dollars to Black-owned media companies.
- 4.** Increase support for implementing the ByBlack directory as a federally recognized Black-owned business certification program to connect buyers and sellers to uplift Black firms.
- 5.** Support the expansion of Black-owned franchise locations as a viable means of business ownership.
- 6.** Ensure that the rise of cryptocurrency and forthcoming policy or regulatory changes creates equal opportunity for Black businesses and future Black entrepreneurs.
- 7.** Support the responsible legalization of cannabis across the United States and advocate for the allowance of federal funding and loans to be made to cannabis-based businesses. USBC will also advocate for the reintroduction and passage of the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement Act.

### ***Increase Equity in Federal Contracting***

- 1.** Reform the Small Business Administration's 8(a) Business Development program by advocating for the re-introduction and passage of Senator Ben Cardin's Federal Contracting Fairness Act.
- 2.** Increase equity for Black firms in the Small Business Administration's 8(a) Business Development program by increasing sole-source thresholds and ensuring parity with Alaska Native Corporations' (ANCs) sole-source thresholds.
- 3.** Double the aggregate percent of contracts going to small, Black-owned firms from 1.67% to 4%.
- 4.** Advocate for the requirement for the Federal Government to publish annual, disaggregated data on contract awards for small and large entities.

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5. Ensure that Black-owned businesses are paid under the Prompt Payment standards (within 15 days from the end of the work period) to ensure continuity in cash flow for Black contractors.
  6. Ensure that Black firms are equally invested in through Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act dollars, advocating for reciprocity between the Small Business Administration's 8(a) program and the Department of Transportation's Disadvantaged Business

### ***Fund and Support Federal Entrepreneurial Development Programs***

1. Fully fund the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) to ensure Black firms receive the business development services needed to thrive.
2. Significantly increase funding for the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund at the Department of the Treasury and ensure funding flows to Black communities.
3. Increase the annual funding for the Women's Business Center Program at the Small Business Administration to support Black women-owned businesses.
4. Increase funding for Small Business Administration 7(j) contracting assistance to connect Black firms to contract opportunities.

### ***Expanding Opportunities for Black Businesses through Trade***

1. Increase business-to-business opportunities between members of the African Diaspora in America and throughout Africa.
2. Require the Export-Import Bank to provide targeted and prioritized capital to Black business owners.
3. Create and foster fair trade deals with African nations that benefit the African American Diaspora through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) reauthorization.