

## Meeting with Legislators and Staff

Face-to-face meetings are the most effective way to influence your legislators. You can meet with them either in their district offices or in Washington, DC. If, as is typically the case, you are unable to see your legislators in person, you should still meet with their staffers. Elected officials staff work on legislation, regulatory, and policy issues every day and greatly influence their bosses' positions and votes.

### ARRANGING THE APPOINTMENT

- Call your legislator's Washington office and ask to speak to the staffer who is responsible for immigration. The Congressional Switchboard number is 202-224-3121. (Generally, Members of Congress are in Washington Tuesday through Thursday and are frequently home Friday through Monday and when Congress is not in session.)
- When you speak to the staffer explain the purpose of the meeting and who will be attending. Make sure to mention that you are a constituent!

### PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

- *DO YOUR HOMEWORK!* Know exactly what you want to say and carefully review your message.
- If possible, compile information about the impact of specific immigration issues on the legislator's district/state. Do not compile a long list of statistics: your elected officials will not remember them and they will lose their impact. Prepare a few dramatic numbers or anecdotes to illustrate your points. Collect recent local news articles that illustrate the issue. Like most people, legislators and staff more easily remember examples conveyed in human and personal terms.
- To encourage legislators to support a specific immigration issue, present materials that clearly articulate your position, using specific case examples when possible.
- Know the counter-arguments and be ready to respectfully answer any questions or disagreements. Call the AILA Advocacy Department for more information and assistance.
- Make sure everyone in your group is prepared. Brief everyone attending the meeting and make sure they have any written materials (biographical profile of legislators and their views, etc.) to review well ahead of time.
- Be organized. Agree ahead of time the role each participant will take, who discusses what, and in what order participants will speak.

- If you are going as part of a larger group or coalition, meet ahead of time. It is unwise to have an internal debate or conversation in front of your elected official or his or her staff. Be certain everyone agrees on your group's central message and what you want to ask the legislator to do for you.
- Prepare a packet to leave with your legislator that could include background information, fact sheets and/or newspaper clippings. Attach your card(s) to the packet.

## **MAKING THE PRESENTATION**

- Be on time!
- Begin by introducing yourselves.
- Explain to the legislator/staffer why you asked for the meeting.
- Present your concerns simply and directly. Get to your "bottom line" immediately. Be brief, direct, courteous and positive. When presenting each issue, do not assume that your legislator has any prior knowledge of the subject. Presentation of each topic roughly should follow this outline:

**BACKGROUND:** Explain the issue in the simplest possible terms.

**IMPACT:** Explain how the issue directly affects your community or the group you represent.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Indicate what you would like your legislator to do. Discuss important immigration legislation or issues currently before Congress and how you hope he or she will vote. If you want your elected officials to support a specific issue, explain how your community has been impacted, and the consequences in concrete terms if, for example, Congress does not pass immigration reform that would legalize the status of hardworking people already in the U.S., create a new future flow program, and reduce family backlogs. Finally, ask your legislator to support legislation that would authorize such reform.

- Do not fight with your legislator or staff members. Politely answer questions and concerns, but if you disagree, make your point and move on. Remember, you are meeting with the Member or staff person to inform him/her about your positions on issues.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, say so, and promise to get back with the answer. Be sure to follow up with your answer as quickly as possible after the meeting.
- Make sure you do not do all of the talking! Give your legislator opportunities to ask questions or state his or her opinion. Members and staff will appreciate the chance to be heard. Also ask questions.

- Stay away from jargon and acronyms. Remember that your legislator deals with dozens, if not hundreds, of issues each week, each with its own “language.”
- Thank your legislators if they have been supportive. They get thanked far less than they get criticized. They will appreciate your recognition.
- Be sure to ask for your legislator’s support. If your legislator already is very supportive, ask him or her to cosponsor the relevant bill and/or take a leadership role in moving the bill through the process, getting additional cosponsors, or other ways.

## **FOLLOWING UP AFTER THE MEETING**

- Send a note thanking the Member or staff person for meeting with you. Briefly summarize the main points of the meeting.
- Remember to follow up with responses to any questions the Member or staff person asked but you could not answer at the time.
- The information you learn in your meeting will be helpful for AILA staff and our allies. Debrief AILA staff so that we can develop a coordinated legislative strategy and message for your district. Contact Jenny Levy in the Advocacy Department to report back about your meeting: (202) 216-2407 or [jlevy@aila.org](mailto:jlevy@aila.org).

## **TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL**

- Do not think of the meeting as an isolated event. Although you may not have a face-to-face meeting again for some time, invite your elected officials to speak at an event or meeting. Think of other ways to maintain the relationship you have initiated.
- Reach out to existing pro-immigrant and pro-immigration advocates in your community. Work together to mobilize a critical mass of allies in your hometown. Together, we can make a difference. Visit the Advocacy Toolkits on InfoNet to find a list of national, state, and local associations and organizations committed to passing fair and reasonable immigration laws.
- Speak up and speak out for the rights of immigrants. Use AILA resources to effectively debunk common myths about immigrants such as “Immigrants are a drain on the U.S. economy” and “Immigrants take jobs away from American workers.”
- Stay informed. Look for *The Pulse: AILA’s Capitol Beat* in your e-mail inbox every Tuesday. It’s your chance to read about the upcoming congressional events that are important for AILA, you, and your clients. Things move quickly inside the beltway and *The Pulse* is your resource for keeping up with the action. You’ll find congressional schedules, the news on comprehensive immigration reform, and specific opportunities to take action in DC and in your community.