



AILA's Town Hall Toolkit

*Maximizing the effectiveness of your advocacy work by
making the most of your Town Hall participation*



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Members of Congress often schedule town hall style or public meetings in their districts. This is a good way for them to get out and talk to their constituents and "take the pulse" of the communities they represent in Congress. It is also a great opportunity for AILA members to educate and inform Senators, Representatives, and other meeting attendees about the need for comprehensive immigration reform, H-1B relief, and other key AILA concerns. Consider attending a Town Hall meeting with your AILA colleagues to show collective support for your shared ideals. Generating a large and well-informed crowd at a public meeting is an extremely effective way to elicit the views of your Member of Congress and to share your perspective. This Tool Kit will provide you with an overview of Town Hall meetings, tips for developing strategic questions to ask your Member of Congress, and the steps for maximizing the effectiveness of your advocacy at the Town Hall meeting. At the end of this article you will find AILA's step-by-step instructions for attending and making the most of your Town Hall participation.

Once you've arranged to attend the Town Hall meeting together with your Chapter colleagues, jointly draft some questions and comments for the host. Questions and comments should be well thought out and to the point because long, laborious questions and speeches will only turn off others in the crowd, including the press. To keep the audience's attention, you may want to relate your question to a real-life example or experience that will help to humanize the politics of immigration. Above all, remember that this is your opportunity, as a constituent, to stand up and ask the Senator or Representative a pointed question about an issue of concern.

For example, on the issue of comprehensive immigration reform, you should tailor your questions to draw out substantive, non-generic answers. Even if your Representative voted *against* HR 4437, you can ask him to elaborate on his position on comprehensive reform: Does he support the Senate bill's approach? Does he acknowledge that any solution must deal realistically with the 12 million undocumented workers in this country, including a meaningful path to legal permanent residence? Does he agree that for enforcement to be effective, we need to create new legal channels for workers to come and fill jobs in the United States? Does he understand the futility of simply building a wall?

Or, on the Senate side, if your Senator voted for S.2611, you may want to press farther and ask if she would oppose a Conference report that deals only with enforcement issues. Does she agree that enforcement alone will not solve the problem? Would she commit to demanding that any solution be comprehensive, including a realistic solution for the 12 million undocumented and a new temporary worker program with labor protections and a path to permanent resident status?

If your Member of Congress staunchly opposes comprehensive immigration reform, you may want to use the Town Hall meeting as an opportunity to deliver a coordinated letter of rebuke from all of the members of your Chapter. Or you may want to evaluate the central arguments the Member of Congress has against comprehensive immigration reform and prepare yourself with a few basic statistics that could refute those arguments. You can find basic statistics and talking points about the [inadequacy of enforcement-only immigration reform](#), the [economic benefits of immigration](#), the [difference between earned legalization and amnesty](#), and other helpful resources on the [Comprehensive Immigration Reform featured topics page](#) and also on the [Immigration Policy Center's homepage](#).

In some cases, a Member of Congress may be unfamiliar with the details of the legislation you wish to discuss. She may refer you to a legislative aide or other staff expert who can better respond to your question. In this situation, make sure to get the full name and contact information of this staff person so that you can raise your question with him.

As always, follow-up is important. If you get an opportunity to ask a question or talk to a Member you should follow it up a day or so later with a letter. This is your chance to thank the Member for meeting with you and for supporting your views, or if they don't, to encourage reconsideration. It is always important to be respectful and courteous regardless of the Member's views and to represent your organization in a professional manner.

Report any happenings back to AILA by emailing Jenny Levy at jlevy@aila.org.

10 Steps for Attending and Making the Most of a Town Hall Meeting with your Member of Congress

1. Read [The Pulse](#) to find out when Members of Congress are holding Town Hall meetings in your community.
2. Work with your Chapter's Executive Committee to coordinate a group of Chapter colleagues to attend the Town Hall meeting together.

3. Research your Members of Congress.

Find out how your Senators and Representatives voted on key immigration issues:

- Senate Roll Call Votes for S. 2611, The Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006:

<http://capwiz.com/aila2/issues/votes/?votenum=157&chamber=S&congress=1092>

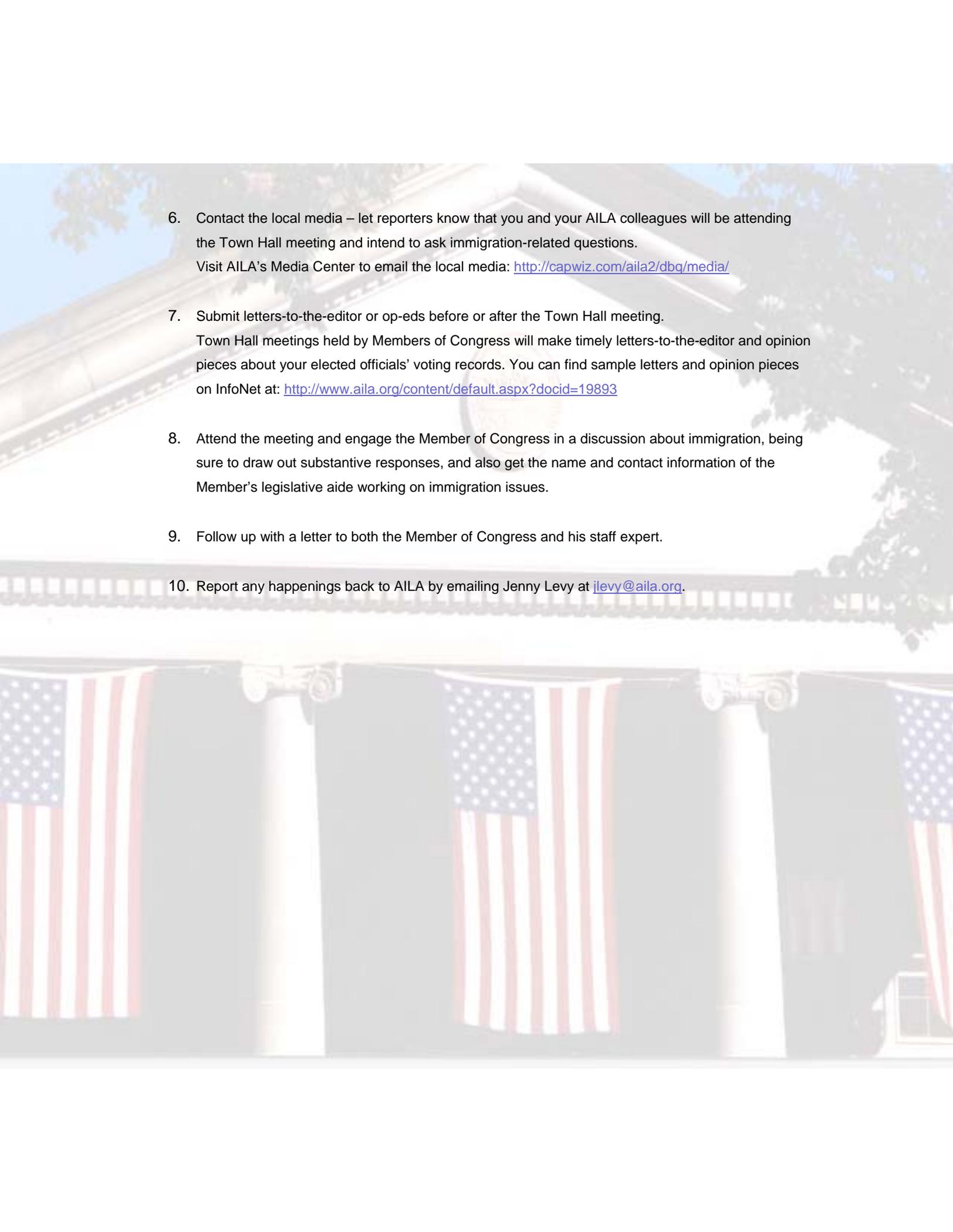
- House Roll Call Votes for H.R. 4437, Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act: <http://capwiz.com/aila2/issues/votes/?votenum=661&chamber=H&congress=1091>

View your Members' key votes to see a broader cross section of their vote histories on immigration issues.

- Find key votes by visiting Contact Congress at <http://capwiz.com/aila2/dbq/officials/>, enter your zipcode and scroll down below the photos to see the "key vote spotlight." If you need to enter your zip+4, you can find the "key vote" button below the legislator's photo.

You can also find biographical and fundraising information about your elected officials on Contact Congress at: <http://capwiz.com/aila2/dbq/officials/>.

4. Review AILA's resources and materials to bolster your familiarity with the current immigration debate.
 - Immigrants are Essential to the US Economy: <http://www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?bc=1019|6755|19887|19888|18805>
 - Why IRCA Failed to Control Illegal Immigration: <http://www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?bc=1019|6755|19887|19888|18803>
 - Polling Summary: Public Support for Comprehensive Immigration Reform: <http://www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?bc=1019|6755|19887|19891|20019>
5. Prepare educated, open-ended questions for your Member of Congress with the intention of drawing out substantive, non-generic answers.

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6. Contact the local media – let reporters know that you and your AILA colleagues will be attending the Town Hall meeting and intend to ask immigration-related questions.
Visit AILA's Media Center to email the local media: <http://capwiz.com/aila2/dbq/media/>
 7. Submit letters-to-the-editor or op-eds before or after the Town Hall meeting.
Town Hall meetings held by Members of Congress will make timely letters-to-the-editor and opinion pieces about your elected officials' voting records. You can find sample letters and opinion pieces on InfoNet at: <http://www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?docid=19893>
 8. Attend the meeting and engage the Member of Congress in a discussion about immigration, being sure to draw out substantive responses, and also get the name and contact information of the Member's legislative aide working on immigration issues.
 9. Follow up with a letter to both the Member of Congress and his staff expert.
 10. Report any happenings back to AILA by emailing Jenny Levy at jlevy@aila.org.