



How to Effectively Engage Your Members of Congress

Now is the time to contact your Senators and Representative to express your views about key issues affecting Arab Americans!

Here's how...

PERSONAL VISITS

Personal visits, either in your home state/district or in Washington, are the most effective means of communicating with your congressional members. Here are some useful tips:

- Schedule a meeting with your Congressman for three to five local Arab American community leaders. Members of Congress have very busy schedules even while in recess, and going in a small group of prominent local leaders rather than individually both demonstrates the seriousness of your meeting request and maximizes the time the Congress member has available. Call the member's office or send a letter (see our sample letter on the next page) and outline what issues you would like to discuss and who will be attending the meeting.
- Whether you're requesting a meeting in Washington DC or in a field office, you may be scheduled to meet with a Congressional staff member. Staffers have considerable influence on their bosses, who rely on them for information and briefings, and also have a strong background in and understanding of the issues. Treat a meeting with a staff member as you would a meeting with your member of Congress.
- Email, fax, or mail an issues brief or a short agenda of what you'd like to cover during your visit. This lets your members of Congress know what concerns you have, gives them or their staff time to do any necessary research, and also lets them know that you respect their schedules and plan to keep the meeting brief.
- Be prompt. Members are extremely busy, and if you are even a few minutes late, your meeting may have to be canceled.
- Mention specific issues, and specific legislation if possible. Ask your representative to consider voting a particular way or cosponsoring a bill.
- Use facts; don't rely on an emotional argument. Do your research on the issues by contacting AAI and other organizations for background information, and read the Action Alerts, AAI position statements, and other relevant resources on our website before your visit.
- If you have concerns or issues on a local level, don't hesitate to ask for their help. Your representatives may,

for example, be willing to facilitate a meeting between local law enforcement and the Arab American community to discuss hate crimes if their schedule permits. Everyone benefits from this type of cooperation.

- Send a note or email of thanks after your visit. Emphasize that you appreciate your representatives taking time to listen to your views and concerns, and that you look forward to continuing cooperation between the member of Congress and the Arab American community in their district. Include a brief summary of the issues discussed and your views.

Even if you aren't meeting your members of Congress during this recess, you CAN make your concerns heard:

- Members of Congress pay attention to the local press. Write letters to the editor or op-ed pieces, and engage with the local media, encouraging them to raise issues with your representatives. (*see our media toolkit*)
- Lay the groundwork now for action in the future: get to know your members of Congress and the candidates for election in your area. Volunteer to distribute leaflets or make phone calls, put up a yard sign, or make a donation to the campaigns of the candidates you support. You'll be making your voice heard through your actions and your vote. And, should those candidates be elected, you can preface a request for a meeting with a mention of your support of their campaign.
- Let AAI know what your concerns are. We work throughout the campaign and election cycle to raise our community's issues with the candidates, and we are the Arab American voice in Washington. Visit our website, www.aaiusa.org, for more information on our efforts and issues.

PHONE CALLS

Phone calls are one of the most common, and easiest, means of communicating with your member's office. Keep in mind:

- Ask to speak to the relevant legislative assistant or, in the case of district offices, caseworker. AAI can help you find the best person to speak with.
- Always be polite when expressing your views.
- Follow up with a letter or email stating your concerns.

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