



## **ACTION ALERT**

### **Organizing Local Allies to Advocate for Immigrant Survivors Suffering Under DHS COVID Intransigence**

COVID-19 is exacerbating the already tremendous barriers survivors face in accessing safety and secure status. Although we are pushing Congress to change its policies to recognize COVID's impact on survivors and their ability to file paper, get work authorization extensions, etc., **we need your help educating your Members of Congress.**

#### **What can you do?**

Now is an opportunity for you and your allies to "meet" with your Representatives and Senators to put a face on the problems survivors are facing and to ask for their help. These issues may include:

- Increasing reports of domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis;
- Survivors losing status and work authorization due to USCIS intransigence in altering deadlines during COVID;
- Lack of access to safety net protections and medical care
- Difficulties filing for immigration protection and responding to USCIS requests
- Harm caused by continued immigration detention and enforcement

Some of you may already be involved in diverse coalitions with unusual messengers but, if not, here are some guidelines and strategies on how to best raise these concerns.

#### **I. Build Coalitions of Diverse Allies**

The most effective messaging for political decision makers comes from those they do not expect to be speaking to an issue = "unusual messengers." So, for instance, at the national level ASISTA has always worked with the DV/SA community, law enforcement, CBOS, and faith-based organizations to message our asks and concerns on immigrant survivors. We encourage you to **bring together your local allies** from such professions and communities to plan and set up a

"meeting" with your Representatives and Senators. Think about who you already work with in these areas:

- Social workers and mental health professionals
- DV/SA and human trafficking groups
- Immigrant CBOs, coalitions and groups
- Faith-based organizations that work with immigrants
- Law enforcement allies and local politicians who support your work
- Racial justice & labor organizations

These "messengers" are much more effective than those of us easily tagged as "immigrants' rights activists." **If you need help thinking through who these people might be in your community, see below for ways to have that conversation with us.**

If you already know these folks, start by **bringing them together on a call or online meeting** to (1) discuss the problems immigrant survivors are facing during the COVID crisis, (2) plan who will contact your Representatives and Senators, and (3) map out the strategy for an online meeting.

## **II. Connect with Your Member of Congress**

The most effective local advocacy strategy is an in-person meeting; **contact the staff at your Representative's and Senator's offices to find out whether and how they are setting up virtual "constituent" meetings**, either while they are in district or back in DC.

As you are working on this, develop a strategy with your allies on who will speak to what problems and issues, and who will make the "asks" for your target Representative or Senator.

Individual stories about your work with survivors will be helpful, but also consider asking your allies to discuss how COVID and USCIS intransigence is hampering their ability to work with survivors. For instance, can your local law enforcement allies message discontent with USCIS' refusal to extend deadlines for people acquiring and submitting U certifications? Can your faith-based allies speak to the harm they are seeing with those who can't get their work authorization or status automatically extended, i.e., no income, food insecurity, having to stay with abusers?

**Remember that from these politicians' perspective, what matters most is that (a) you are voting constituents and (b) your group represents a cross-section of that voting constituency.** No matter how good or bad your Representatives and Senators may be on immigration policy, the stark political reality is that they are more motivated by whether they can get elected again

than whether they are doing the "right thing." Your group should think about how to convince your target Representatives and Senators that they should **do the right thing because it will make powerful voting constituencies happy. Women/DV/SA, law enforcement, local politicians, faith-based organizations, and some immigrant CBOs (depends on whether they can vote) are all powerful constituents**, whether they realize it or not, because **they can mobilize many others to weigh in if necessary.**

### III. Be Prepared with Asks

**It's always worth starting with an open-ended question, i.e., "what can YOU do, Representative or Senator, to help solve this problem?"**

Two immediate efforts they can help with are to **contact DHS supporting the requests we are all making to help survivors during the pandemic, described [here](#).** Pending legislation, such as Congressional COVID-related bills, address some but not all the issues in this advocacy document. Supporting a bill is important, but **DHS can fix many of these problems without legislation**, so any kind of pressure members of Congress can put on DHS will help.

For instance, your group may wish to ask:

- Can you call the head of DHS asking him to fix the problems noted in the letter?
- Can you hold a local or national virtual hearing on the problems immigrant survivors are facing during COVID?
- What else can you do (insert your own ideas here too)?
- What can we do for you?

This latter ask is important and is basic psychology. **If you are helpful to them, they are more motivated to help you.**

Make sure to **bring some materials** to leave with your Representative or Senator (or their staff, more likely). Feel free to adapt existing resources below to include local examples in your district. Finally, it's always good practice to **follow-up with a thank you letter** from the group and a little **pestering of any staff assigned to your meeting about future steps** the Representative or Senator will take. This is a **relationship that you and your group should work to maintain** so you can "activate" their assistance for future efforts.

### IV. How ASISTA can help

We can help you in a variety of ways, including

- one-on-one strategy planning,

- a zoom call for your local group to help develop strategy, and
- a national call for those who are interested in pursuing this vital local/state advocacy.

**National call: Monday, May 4, 2 - 3 EST, [To register, click here.](#)**

**For Individual or group technical assistance on strategy development,** contact Gail Pendleton at [gail@asistahelp.org](mailto:gail@asistahelp.org)

**Sample background materials you can edit for use for your meeting**

*ASISTA letter to USCIS with asks organized by theme:*

<https://asistahelp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ASISTA-letter-to-USCIS-4.7.20.pdf>

*Summary of ASISTA asks re survivors during COVID:*

<https://asistahelp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ASISTA-USCIS-COVID-19-Recommendations.pdf>

*Action alert on Coronavirus Immigrant Family Protection Act =*

<https://mailchi.mp/fbce8948c410/tell-congress-to-co-sponsor-bill-that-supports-immigrant-survivors-of-violence?e=8bc83abeb8>

*Text of Coronavirus Immigrant Family Protection Act*

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/6437/text?r=3&s=1>