



## **PRACTICE POINTER: Requesting Congressional Liaison Assistance**

**September 2020**

When case issues arise with DHS and your inquiries go unanswered, Congressional liaisons may be able to help. Liaisons are most effective in cases involving procedural issues, such as a case that needs to be expedited or that has gotten stuck, or in cases involving compelling circumstances where you are seeking assistance in influencing an agency's decision, such as a stay of removal or release from detention. However, you can request liaison assistance for any kind of case issue that may arise. Below, we have provided some tips for making a Congressional liaison assistance request.

### **Step 1: Who are your client's congresspeople?**

Determine who your client's congresspeople are. Your client will have [two senators](#) and one representative, determined by their zip code. The client can request liaison assistance from either senator, but if requesting liaison assistance from the representative, you must find the congressperson who represents ***your client's district*** because the client is the constituent, not the attorney or advocate. You can figure out who your client's representative is by entering their zip code into the House's [Find Your Representative](#) webpage.

### **Step 2: To which Congressperson should I submit the request?**

While you can submit simultaneous requests to both senators and the representative, you may find it more efficient to select one unless you are trying to get as much attention on your issue as possible. When selecting which office to target, you should consider how friendly each congressperson is to immigration and/or domestic violence-related issues. You can also check local listservs or the ASISTAexperts listserv to see which congressional office has a stronger record of advocating on behalf of immigrant constituents. Some offices have a dedicated staff member for immigration-related inquiries, which may mean that the staff

member is more familiar with immigration issues and the relevant agencies. If you cannot determine which congressperson would be more favorable, you can try all three or just select one.

**Practice Tip:** Developing a relationship with the local senators' and representatives' offices may help you better understand who will be most effective in providing liaison assistance. For example, you can schedule informational meetings with Congressional staff to discuss your or your agency's work and the systemic issues that your clients face. Through building those relationships, you can help advocate for Congressional oversight and also learn which offices are most willing to aid their immigrant constituents. For more information about Congressional advocacy, please refer to our [congressional advocacy toolkit](#).

### **Step 3: What do I need to submit the request?**

To submit the request, you must submit the signed privacy release form. Many congressional offices have an immigration-specific release form; others may use a generic release. Your office's release form is not sufficient, nor is a DHS Form G-28. The release form may have a section for you to explain the issue. Otherwise, you should submit a cover letter explaining what the issue is and what you want the Congressperson to do. See Appendix for a sample cover letter. You should also submit any documents that the Congressperson or their staff would need to understand the problem.

Remember that the client is the constituent, so most offices will respond directly to the client. In the request, you can ask them to copy you on any response to the client. Remember to let them know if language translation or interpretation is needed.

### **Step 4: How do I find the Privacy Release Form and send the request?**

Go to the congressperson's website. Every congressperson has an official [House](#) or [Senate](#) website. On their website, there is a section for constituent services or for help with a federal agency. The privacy release form should be posted there, along with information on where to submit the request and supporting documentation.

For example, [Rep. Pramila Jayapal represents the 7th District of Washington State](#). Under the "[Services](#)" tab of her website, there is a link for "[Help with a](#)

[Federal Agency.](#)” From there, you can find the link to Rep. Jayapal’s [immigration-specific privacy release form](#) and instructions for submitting the form.

### **Step 5: What happens next?**

The congressional office will contact the client to confirm receipt of the request and also to ask any follow-up questions. If you asked them to copy you on the response, they should do so. Once the office submits the inquiry to USCIS, they will wait 30 days to allow the agency to respond. Once they receive the response, they will forward it to you. If there is additional advocacy needed, you can continue to communicate with USCIS through the congressperson’s office.

While congressional liaison assistance cannot guarantee a favorable outcome, it can be helpful, especially when USCIS refuses to communicate with you because they will at least respond to the congressional staff’s inquiry. In addition, there is no need to wait a specified period for USCIS to resolve the issue before reaching out to the congressperson, and you can submit simultaneous requests to the congressional office, the [USCIS Ombudsman](#), and ASISTA.

Congressional assistance requests can also raise the profile of systemic issues with the congressperson, which can aid in garnering support for congressional oversight of USCIS.

If you have any questions about this document, please contact ASISTA at [questions@asistahelp.org](mailto:questions@asistahelp.org).

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## APPENDIX

### Sample Cover Letter for Congressional Liaison Assistance Request

Dear Senator Arrabally:

I am writing on behalf of my client, Clara Hashmi, a resident of the 13th Congressional district of Pennsylvania, to request assistance in obtaining an adjustment of status (I-485) interview at the USCIS Colombo Field Office based on her approved VAWA self-petition (I-360). Ms. Hashmi has been waiting for USCIS to schedule her adjustment of status interview for 29 months, ever since USCIS approved her VAWA self-petition based on domestic violence by her U.S. citizen spouse.

The relevant procedural history is as follows:

- March 10, 2016: Ms. Hashmi filed her VAWA self-petition concurrently with her application to adjust status
- April 16, 2018: USCIS's Vermont Service Center approved Ms. Hashmi's VAWA self-petition. Her application to adjust status remains pending.

Ms. Hashmi is a survivor of domestic violence and has two minor children who reside in Aldovia with their frail and elderly grandparents. Her children cannot lawfully immigrate to the United States until Ms. Hashmi has adjusted her status, i.e., become a lawful permanent resident. In addition, Ms. Hashmi currently has no lawful status despite the approval of her VAWA self-petition and needs to adjust her status in order to facilitate her recovery from years of abuse.

I have contacted USCIS to inquire about the status of Ms. Hashmi's adjustment of status application but have not received a response. I am including a copy of Ms. Hashmi's I-485 receipt notice and I-360 approval notice.

Please copy me on any correspondence with Ms. Hashmi. Ms. Hashmi does not speak English and will need Aldovian language interpretation or translation.

Sincerely,

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