How to Lobby Your Member of Congress

Through coordinated legislative advocacy, AIUSA activists gain the power to influence important human rights legislation. All groups are asked to participate in at least one of AIUSA’s coordinated lobbying efforts each year. Contact your legislative coordinator (LC) by calling 1.866.219.4466 to ask about current lobbying efforts in your state, background on your legislators, and tips to maximize your efforts.

What Is Lobbying?

- Lobbying is getting your government to work for you. It is not limited to the hallowed halls of Congress or restricted to professional lobbyists – it is a tool we can all use to communicate with our decision-makers and shape the communities in which we live.

- Lobbying takes many forms, such as writing a letter, showing up for a public event, making a phone call, sending a fax/email/form letter, or anything else you can do to provide your elected official with information about your issue and a request for him/her to act on it.

How Do I Lobby?

Do Your Homework

- Find out what positions your elected member has taken in the past on maternal health legislation – for example, use the list in this toolkit to determine if your representative was a cosponsor of either the Global MOMS Act or the MOMS for the 21st Century Act in the 111th Congress.

- Familiarize yourself with the specific legislation you want to address using the information contained in this toolkit, including the talking points and the information you can provide to your legislator. Once you’ve done your homework, you are ready to make contact with your legislator.

Contact Your Elected Official

- Be ACCURATE: The key to influencing the people who represent you is proving to them that you are a well-informed, committed, and persistent constituent. You need to be a credible source of information – if you don’t know something, tell your Congress member you will find out and get back to him/her.
  - Ensure that as a representative of Amnesty you represent AIUSA’s views accurately. Use the legislative talking points and legislative issue briefs (contained in this toolkit) to fax or bring to a meeting with your legislator’s office. The talking points are for your use in preparing for your meeting; leave the issue briefs with your legislator’s office.

- Be BRIEF: The official and his/her staff are incredibly busy, and so are you. They appreciate it when you respect their time, so get to your request in the first few minutes. Be ready with the bill number and the specific action you want your legislator to take (for example, cosponsor/support the legislation). Provide a copy of any relevant materials you will be talking about, such as the Issue Briefs contained in this toolkit or a list of current cosponsors.

- Be COURTEOUS: Always, always, always be courteous! A thank you letter to the staff member for listening to your concerns, especially if they take action, is ALWAYS recommended. Commend your elected official publicly, including letters to the editor or items in a newsletter (and share copies with his/her staff).
Ways Of Lobbying

Write A Letter

- **Handwrite your letter** if possible. Be sure to include your name and address on the letter and envelope so they know you are a constituent.

- **Be brief and personal.** Share your knowledge and experiences with maternal health. Feel free to mention any organizations you are working with on this issue.

- **Be specific.** Cite a specific bill number or an individual case. Be sure to include the specific action you want your elected official to take (e.g. cosponsor/support the bill). Ask them to respond with information about the action taken.

- **Thank your official** for any positive steps s/he has taken in the recent past.

- **Follow-up.** Continue to maintain contact with the office to ensure that your elected official fulfills his/her commitments. Continue to provide information, and thank him or her for any positive actions taken.

Make a Phone Call

- **Call your US Senator / Representative** by contacting the Capitol Hill switchboard at 202.224.3121. Ask to speak with the legislative assistant dealing with women’s issues and/or human rights concerns.

- **Identify yourself as a constituent.** You might also mention your AI group, if appropriate.

- **Be specific.** Identify the bill(s) you are concerned with and the action you would like your legislator to take. Ask if your legislator has taken a position on the legislation. Volunteer to provide further information about the bill or about maternal health in general. Ask for the name of the person you spoke to and let him or her know that you will be calling back to follow up.

- **Follow up** with a thank you note and any information you promised to provide.

Schedule an In-Person Meeting

- Personal meetings are the most effective method of lobbying. Your group can organize a meeting with your member of Congress on the issue of maternal health, or join an AIUSA lobbying delegation in Washington DC or at your representative’s district office in your state.

- If you are interested in meeting with your legislator in person, please contact your legislative coordinator for more tips on effective in-person lobbying.

What Are The Next Steps?

- Concentrate on building a relationship. Lobbying can take awhile, and the more focused you are, the better the results. Remember that the bill you are working on may not pass during this session or that you may undertake another legislative initiative next year. Establishing this relationship is key to your work in future sessions.

- Thank your legislator publicly. Write a letter to the editor or a short article for your group’s newsletter. Be sure to share the information with your legislator.

- Continue to track the bill and provide periodic updates to your legislator as necessary.

- Share the news of your interaction with AIUSA by filling out a Debrief Form (contained in this toolkit) and sharing it with your volunteer Legislative Coordinator and the Washington DC office of Amnesty International.