

# Advocacy How-To Guides



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## ADVOCACY

### Overview

Advocacy is the work of persuading a decision-maker, usually a government, business or other large institution, to take a particular action that benefits a particular group of people. In our context, advocacy is meant to create large-scale or systemic change – the goal is to change policy and practice at a local, state, or national level in a way that benefits an entire group of individuals. This is different than advocacy on behalf of one individual that seeks to change the situation for just that person – this is often the goal of direct legal or social services.

Advocacy can take many forms, such as:

- Organizing – building power in the community
- Public Education – providing information on issues, educating the community about the legislative and political process
- Community Mobilization – organizing a public rally or protest to bring attention to an issue
- Educate Legislators – educating public officials on your community and its issues
- Nonpartisan voter mobilization – encouraging eligible citizens to register and vote
- Litigation – taking your issue to court
- Lobbying – advocating for or against specific legislation.

Whatever its form, at its core advocacy is the active promotion of a cause or principle. When deciding on your advocacy plan, consider these factors:

- **Know the facts:** Do your best to have accurate information about your issue immediately available: How many people are affected? How much money will it cost to implement a policy? If you don't have all the information, say so, don't make it up!
- **State your message clearly:** Have a short clear statement that explains your position and what you want.
- **Build relationships:** You are more likely to succeed if you have allies on your side.
- **Engage the public:** Educate everyone about your issue, not just your community – use social media, petitions, and emails to get out the word and build support.

In this packet we will be covering three advocacy techniques:

- Legislative Visits
- Writing “Op-Eds” and Letters to the Editor
- Petitions and Sign-On Letters



## VISITING LEGISLATORS

In-person visits are essential in gaining the support of legislators. These visits are an opportunity for legislators to hear directly from constituents about key issues affecting the communities they represent. Visiting representatives from the district where you live is most important.

As you plan your visit, keep in mind the goals of your meeting:

- To educate your legislator about issues important to your community
- To get information from your legislator about his/her position on key issues and pending bills that impact immigrant and refugee communities
- To ask for his/her support on key issues.

### **Before Your Visit:**

- **Make an appointment!** All legislators have local district offices as well as offices in the state capitol (for state legislatures) or Washington, DC (for U.S. Congress and U.S. Senate). You can look up the names of your federal representatives and find their contact information online at: <http://www.house.gov/> and <http://www.senate.gov>. Most states have online resources to find your local legislator.
- **Don't go alone!** Bring someone else who cares about issues affecting your community. This could be a student, a teacher, a local business owner, or a faith leader.
- **Prepare!** A typical visit will last approximately 15-30 minutes. Because time may be short, it is critical to plan your message in advance in order to have an effective visit. Read the materials you will be bringing with you so you understand them and practice your talking points. In addition, be sure everyone who is attending knows what their speaking role is and designate a note-taker. As a team, make sure there is a clear introduction and closing to the visit.

### **At Your Visit:**

- **Introductions and Who You Are:** Make sure every participant is able to introduce themselves, where they live, and any organizational affiliations they have. Thank the legislator or staff member for their time and for any work they have done in the past in support of your cause or other pro-refugee or pro-immigrant policies (if you have this information).
- **Why You Are There:** Using the talking points you prepared before the meeting, briefly outline the issues you are there to advocate on and why it is important for the legislator to support your position. This is a good time to give the legislator and/or staff a copy of any fact sheet handout you brought.
- **Personalize It:** Put a face on the issue through a personal story. Sharing personal stories is an important tool in educating legislators. This is where you and other community members can show how policies will affect real people who live in the legislator's district. If



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you don't have a story to share, bring written testimonials, pictures, or drawings that illustrate how important the issue is to people who live in the district.

- **What You Want:** You are here to ask legislators to do something, and they expect you to ask for something. This could be asking them to support or oppose certain bills or asking about the legislator's position on a general issue that may be coming up in the future. Make your ask clear and direct so the legislator knows what you want, and you can get a clear yes/no answer.
- **Thank You:** Thank the legislator and any staff you met with for their time. If the legislator or staff had questions you were unable to answer, make sure to get their contact information so you can follow-up.

### After the Visit:

- Follow-up with any information requested by the legislator or their staff.
- If the visit is a part of a larger advocacy day, be sure to report back on what happened at your meeting.



# Visiting Legislators – Worksheet

**I. Introductions and Who We Are**

**Speaker:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**II. Why We Are Here**

**Speaker:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**III. Personalize It**

**Speaker:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**IV. What We Want**

**Speaker:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**V. Thank You and Leave Materials**



## SAMPLE HANDOUT

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### HOW IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES STRENGTHEN PA

*Pennsylvania has been built on immigrant contributions. From the early arrival of Pennsylvania “Dutch” to Italians, Irish, African, and Chinese, to more recent waves of Latin American, South and Southeast Asian, Eastern European, Korean, Arab, and new African immigrants, most Pennsylvanian families were once immigrants, and newcomers continue to build the strength and prosperity of our state.*

**Engineers, Scientists, and Innovators:** According to the Census Bureau, immigrants represent 33 percent of engineers, 27 percent of mathematicians, statisticians, and computer scientists, and 24 percent of physical scientists.<sup>1</sup> Immigrants bring intellectual talent to our Pennsylvania communities, as they develop new products and technologies that lead to jobs and global economic competitiveness.<sup>2</sup>

**Diversity Engages Development:** Waves of immigration have kept our country demographically young, have enriched our culture, and enhanced our influence in the world.<sup>3</sup> Pennsylvania ranks fourth among all states in the percentage of people 65 and older and immigration is necessary to help fill the labor force gap created by baby boomers’ retirement.<sup>4</sup>

**Taxes:** Undocumented immigrants pay taxes. Undocumented immigrants paid \$135 million in Pennsylvania state and local taxes in 2010<sup>5</sup> and undocumented immigrants contribute approximately \$8.5 billion in Social Security and Medicare funds each year. Many states have found that immigrants have a positive net fiscal impact on their state budgets.<sup>6</sup>

**Immigrants Feed Pennsylvania:** Pennsylvania’s \$6.7 billion agriculture and food production industry is key to the state remaining competitive in the global economy. Leaders in Pennsylvania’s agribusiness sector have testified to the need for immigrant labor to supplement waning domestic interest in farming jobs and sustained expansion of this sector.<sup>7</sup>

**New job growth, new businesses, and purchasing power:** Immigrants comprised 7.1% of the state workforce in 2011.<sup>8</sup> Latinos and Asians wield \$36.4 billion in consumer purchasing power<sup>9</sup>, own businesses with sales and receipts of \$14.8 billion, and employ more than 73,000 people.<sup>10</sup> In 2010, Pennsylvania immigrants were more than 50 percent more likely to own a business than the overall state average.<sup>11</sup>

**Immigrants Seek Integration and Civic Participation:** Immigrants and refugees work hard to integrate and participate fully in the civic life of their new country. 52% of Pennsylvania immigrants are naturalized citizens.<sup>12</sup> PICC has registered more than 30,000 new citizens to vote since 2008.

**Free and Welcoming Society:** Pennsylvania has attracted diverse groups of people from many nations and walks of life, seeking liberty and a better life. Our communities are strongest when everyone who lives in them feels welcome. In the spirit of inclusion in which our country was founded, we should continue to welcome newcomers and oppose measures that isolate or scapegoat immigrants and refugees.

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<sup>1</sup> Furman, J., & Gray, D. (2012). *Ten Ways Immigrants Help Build and Strengthen Our Economy* (United States, The White House, President Barack Obama).

<sup>2</sup> Bellows, J. (2011). *The Many Contributions of Immigrants to the American Economy* (United States, US Department of the Treasury).

<sup>3</sup> Griswald, D. (2002). *Immigrants have enriched American culture and enhanced our influence in the world* (United States, CATO Institute).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *The Older Population: 2010*, November 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Immigration Policy Center, “Unauthorized Immigrants Pay Taxes, Too”, April 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Eduardo Porter, “Illegal Immigrants Are Bolstering Social Security With Billions, New York Times, April 5, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Howells, M., “Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs.” *PLS Committee News*, Pennsylvania Legislative Services, Oct. 23 2007; Carl Weiss, “Immigration Reform Will Help Pennsylvania Agriculture”, *PennLive Op-Ed*, October 23, 2013; Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, 2014 Agricultural Labor Reform, January 2014

<sup>8</sup> Immigration Policy Center, “New Americans in Pennsylvania”, June 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Humphreys, J.M., *The Multicultural Economy 2010*, Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Estimates of Business Ownership by Gender, Ethnicity, Race, and Veteran Status: 2007*, June 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Fiscal Policy Institute, “Immigrant Small Business Owners”, June 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Immigration Policy Center, “New Americans in Pennsylvania”, June 2015.



## WRITING AN “OP-ED” OR LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Most newspapers publish opinion essays submitted by community leaders, experts, elected officials, and just plain citizens. These are known generically as op-eds because they often appear opposite the editorial page. A Letter to the Editor (LTE) is a chance for readers to respond to articles in a newspaper or express their opinion on an issue they feel passionate about. Op-Eds and LTEs are great ways for community members to express their opinions and help guide the public conversation about important topics. Before you submit to a publication, read the paper’s guidelines for submission and read some of the op-eds and LTEs it has previously published to observe what issues are covered, who gets published, and how other people present their arguments.

### Planning Your Letter:

**Length:** Op-eds are short, 700-800 words maximum, and LTEs are even shorter, often 200 words maximum. Each paper determines its own guidelines for length, submission, topics, etc. Be prepared for the paper to suggest edits for clarity or space.

**Messengers:** Papers are often more likely to publish an op-ed from a recognized expert or prominent local leader. If you do not have any particular expertise or knowledge of the issue, consider enlisting someone prominent or influential in the community to submit it under their name. Ghost writing op-eds for others is very common.

**Where to Submit:** Start out by submitting to your local paper.

### Writing Your Letter:

**Grab attention:** An opening paragraph should get the reader’s attention and invite them to read on. Use strong, colorful language, humor, unusual examples, and establish what or who is at stake. A personal story or sympathetic anecdotes about the people that would be affected if action is taken, or not taken, are a good way to draw readers in.

**State your position/Call to action:** You should clearly state the position you are advocating or the action you are asking the reader to take. Be concise and clear, you want the reader to easily grasp your viewpoint (e.g., “Pennsylvania should pass a tuition equity bill”).

**Your evidence:** Provide supporting evidence and examples that develop your argument. Remember to be succinct and give priority to the most important or compelling evidence. This part needs to draw the connection between the reader and the position you are taking. Why is it in the best self-interest of the reader to agree with your position? What’s in it for them? You want to structure your argument so that readers walk away agreeing with your position.

**The closer:** The closing can be an opportunity to engage the reader, put a human face on the problem, state the consequences of not taking your position, or to end with a clever and memorable “zinger.”

**About the author:** For an op-ed, include a one line description of who you are, and why you are qualified to advise others on what position to take.

**NOTE:** Keep in mind that these are guidelines, not a formula. The order of the sections and content of the letter should reflect the voice of the author and the issue at hand.



## EXAMPLES

### DACA Anniversary Op-Ed

Three years ago today, I never expected to hear President Obama's announcement about Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the immigration relief program that gave temporary renewable 2-year work authorization to certain undocumented immigrants who entered the country before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and before June 2007. After years of living in fear, I could now feel safe because DACA granted me protection from deportation. I could share my story with my friends and the world, no longer living in the shadows.

My story begins when I was 6 years old and my parents left Ecuador for the United States looking for work to better provide for me and my siblings. After three years without contact except for phone calls and care packages, we were reunited in the States as a family, leaving our former lives behind in the hopes for a better future.

In the States, we were met with many challenges because of our status. For years, I slept with a bag under my bed filled with clothes, some money, and a number and address for an uncle in Vermont. I prayed that I would never have to use it, but we lived in fear of deportation breaking up our family. My mother felt powerless, angry, and scared. But my parents did not give up.

My parents have lived and contributed to the U.S. for 16 years. They raised children in this country and, together, we are contributing to a better country with our talents and skills. Yet there are extremists who treat us like second-class citizens. We live in constant fear that our mother will be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and our family will be separated again, all because of a faction of anti-immigrant Republicans blocking relief.

During my senior year of college, I wondered how I would be able to advance my career if I couldn't work within my field because I didn't have work authorization. What was the point of working hard in school, of my parents sacrificing so much to pay for college, if I would continue to work odd jobs that didn't move me forward?

Then DACA was announced in June 2012. With DACA, I finally had the chance to be the person I wanted to be, and I could claim as my own the country I had called home for over a decade. DACA gave me the kind of peace I never had growing up.

While I can now begin to follow my dreams, my parents' still live in fear.

With the President's announcement last November about Expanded DACA and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA), my mother would qualify for DAPA because my youngest sister was born in the U.S. Our mixed status family would finally come out of the shadows and live a normal life.

Today, we should be celebrating the anniversary of DACA and access to DAPA. Instead, we are scared and anxious about our family's future. With these programs, we have an opportunity at our fingertips, but our path is being blocked by anti-immigrant Republicans. Governor Abbott of Texas and 26 other states filed a lawsuit against the federal government to stop the President's executive action.

These delays are not just pieces of a political game—they affect the lives of millions of families that remain at risk of being separated by deportation.



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Like the millions living in this fearful limbo, we want to make our lives better, and in turn make America better. So how can this land of opportunity allow families to be torn apart every day, denying millions the chance to improve their lives?

We understand the value of the President's executive action because we lived it. DACA gave me the chance to work and give back by educating and helping other immigrant families like mine. Many immigrant rights groups around the country are making our voices heard with rallies, vigils, marches, and protests. We showed up in New Orleans during a 5<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court hearing about the immigration lawsuit to let those inside the courtroom and around the country know that we are not going stop fighting for our families. And we did let them know because they could hear our families' chants and songs during the proceedings.

It is time to leave behind the legal battles and give families a chance to live in this country freely, contributing to our communities, and building a better America.

The battle in the courts may be slow, but it is not lost. The law is on our side. We will continue to #Fight4DAPA so that millions of other families, like mine, can stay together in the country they call home. We will not stop fighting until we win relief for all our families.

*Maria Sotomayor is a DACA recipient from Pennsylvania. She works as the Pennsylvania Deferred Action Coordinator with Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (PICC), a nonprofit organization that advocates for immigrants, refugees and New Americans. Sotomayor has also worked with La Puerta Abierta, an organization that provides mental health counseling to undocumented immigrants. PICC is part of the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM), the nation's largest immigrant rights coalition.*

### **Syrian Refugee Resettlement in PA**

November 18, 2015

As a Pennsylvanian and Bishop of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, I am proud of Governor Tom Wolf's decision to continue to work with the Federal Government in welcoming Syrian refugees to our state.

As we mourn the lives lost in Paris and Beirut, we also remember that ordinary Syrians have also suffered persecution, by their own government and now by a merciless terrorist organization. Imagine trying to raise your children in such an environment. Imagine trying to move them to safety, only to be told that you yourself were now considered suspect.

Pennsylvania has long welcomed refugees from a diversity of countries. Over the years, Lutherans across this nation have welcomed more than a half million people fleeing violence and persecution. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is a secure, public-private partnership that has saved the lives of vulnerable people and helped them to thrive and give back to the United States. Thanks to a robust security screening process implemented by the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security and related entities, we have welcomed refugees with confidence and very positive results. It breaks my heart that so many other governors have abandoned that honorable tradition now, when the need is so great.

Sincerely,  
The Reverend Claire S. Burkat, Bishop  
Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA



## PETITIONS & SIGN-ON LETTERS

Petitions and sign-on letters are a great tool for showing how much support your issue has and for building a list of individuals or organizations that support you and may be willing to take future action.

### ***Types of Petitions and Sign-On Letters:***

- **Targeted Petition:** A targeted petition or sign-on letter is addressed to a specific person asking them to take (or not take) a specific action, e.g. asking a legislator to vote for pro-refugee legislation or asking the CEO of a company to change their business practices. For this type of petition it is important that the majority of individuals or organizations that sign are constituents of the specific person, e.g. individuals who live in the legislator's district, or employees of a company.
- **Issue-Based Petition:** An issue-based petition or sign-on letter shows the level of support for a particular idea or policy proposal. This type of petition does not need to be addressed to a specific person.

### ***Collecting Signatures:***

In most cases, the more signatures you have on your petition or sign-on letter, the more powerful it is as an advocacy tool. Before you start collecting signatures, think about what group of people or organizations you want to support your issue, that will help you decide what method will be the most effective for collecting the number of signatures you want.

- **Paper:** You can print out your petition or sign-on letter and ask people to sign at events, go door-to-door in your neighborhood, or ask people to sign-on at a busy intersection in your city.
- **Online:** Use one of the many free online platforms like Change.org, MoveOn or a Google form to host your petition. These platforms generally come in two varieties, one that collects all the signatures in one list to print or deliver all at once, or a petition that automatically sends an email to your target every time someone signs.

### ***How to Use a Petition or Sign-On Letter:***

You've collected the signatures, now you have to decide the most effective way to use them. Are you trying to show a specific person how much support there is for a particular policy? Are you trying to raise awareness about an issue?

- Deliver a physical copy of the petition and list of signatures. This is best used when you have a specific target who can take action on your issue, as it shows that person that the particular course of action has support.
- Publish your petition or sign-on letter with the list of signatures in a local paper or on your website. This can help raise the profile of your issue and show public officials and community members how much support your issue has.
- Hold a press conference. This is another way to raise the profile of your issue.



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## ***Follow-Up:***

After you have finished collecting signatures, you will have a list of individuals and/or organizations who support your issue. This is a great opportunity to get more people involved in your organization or issue!

- Invite signers to a community meeting to discuss the issue and ask them to get involved with your organization
- Ask signers to participate in advocacy efforts to advocate on behalf of the issue or policy
- Ask signers to attend a meeting with the targeted official

## ***Tips:***

- Make sure you are clear about what information you collect from individuals or organizations will be made public.
- Have a deadline for collecting signatures to create a sense of urgency and encourage people to immediately sign-on.
- Let people know whether you will be contacting them again, and be sure to include an “opt-out” for people who don’t want to be added to an email or phone contact list.