

Advocacy Toolkit for Congressional Casework Inquiries



Center for Human Rights & Constitutional Law

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I. Introduction

Members of Congress have a duty to serve and advocate for everyone who resides in their districts – including every community member across all immigration statuses, from undocumented community members to green card holders and citizens.

U.S. Representatives can open cases to assist constituents with matters related to federal agencies, including USCIS, and in some cases they can be a strong ally and resource who can leverage their oversight powers to support their constituents.

This guide is designed to help community members and advocates effectively navigate and mobilize congressional intervention for individual cases.

II. What is in this toolkit

Whether you are a constituent preparing your own file, a family member advocating for a loved one, or an advocate assisting a community member, this toolkit will provide a roadmap for how to engage with Congressional offices and request their assistance with your case. Attached please find the following documents:

1. Overview: Opening a Congressional Casework Inquiry with Your Representative: An overview of how Congressional constituent services work, what Members of Congress and their caseworkers can and cannot do, and how a casework inquiry can support your case
2. Step-by-Step Guide to Opening a Casework File: A step-by-step guide outlining how to document your case, verify your Member of Congress, and contact your representative.
3. Prepare for Your Meeting: Instructions to ensure a productive meeting with district staff and/or caseworkers
4. Intake Checklist and Case Narrative Template: A checklist of information to share with Congressional staff, including a ready to use template to organize your information and narrative
5. Sample Privacy Release Form: Sample questions you should be prepared to fill out to request help from your Representative.

Overview: Opening a Congressional Casework Inquiry with Your Representative

What is Congressional Casework?: Every Congressional office is dedicated to constituent casework, functioning as a liaison between those they represent and federal agencies. Casework refers to the services that Congressmembers provide to constituents seeking assistance. Common requests for casework include assistance with immigration matters.

What Can Congressmembers Do? Members can generally ask for information related to a case, urge prompt consideration, arrange for interviews or appointments, express judgments, or call for reconsideration of an administrative response that the Member believes is not reasonably supported by statutes, regulations, or considerations of equity or public policy.

Why Open a Congressional Casework Inquiry? Members of Congress and their staff may be limited in how they can directly intervene in an agency's decisionmaking process on behalf of an individual case, but federal agencies are often responsive to congressional concerns. Requesting the Member to issue a Congressional inquiry with USCIS will require the agency to provide a written status update.

Notes:

- Each Member has substantial discretion in how they define and approach casework
- Congressional offices can only assist with federal agencies (e.g., DHS, USCIS, ICE, Department of State) and do not have authority over state or local agencies.

What Can Congressional Caseworkers Do? Caseworkers are the main liaison between the constituent and the federal agency throughout the casework process. Caseworkers can contact a federal agency's congressional liaison after a constituent provides a signed Privacy Act waiver. The Privacy Act waiver permits the agency to share the constituent's personal information with the Member.

Caseworkers are expected to learn the laws and policies that affect a constituent's case. You are encouraged to share with the Member's office and caseworker any laws or cases that would be helpful in understanding your specific circumstances.

Step-By-Step Guide to Opening a Casework File

1	Gather documentation of relevant records <i>before</i> contacting your Member Use our template: Case Background Checklist and Narrative	
2	Verify your current member of Congress: https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member Identify the agency you want help with: • Find your local USCIS Field Office • Find your local ICE Field Office • Locate a CBP Field Office	
3	Contact your Member of Congress	
	(3.1a) 3 Ways to Schedule a meeting: Website, Phone, or Email	
	Website	Go to the navigation bar or footer and find “Contact”. Each office has specific instructions for how to contact their office. Some may have an online request form.
	Phone	<u>Locating a number:</u> A phone number can be found on the navigation bar or footer of their website. If their website does not list phone numbers for their district or D.C. office, check if they have a general inquiry form on their “Contact” page. Fill in your contact information and a staffer will reach out to you. You can also enter a search for their phone number on the internet. <u>When you call their office:</u> 1. Briefly introduce yourself. Sometimes offices may ask for your zip code to verify that you are a constituent. Ask to speak with the scheduler. 2. When you speak with the scheduler, briefly share who you are, the purpose of the meeting, when you would like to meet, and who will be attending (e.g., yourself, family, advocate, attorney). 3. Ask the scheduler if there is an immigration staffer. If there is an immigration staffer, ask for their name and contact information. 4. Request to receive an email confirmation of the meeting
	Email	Some offices may ask you to submit a request in writing when you call their office. If that is the case, ask the person you are speaking with for: ☐ their name and the email(s) of the staffer(s) you need to contact ☐ an estimated response time

		☐ If you do not hear back within the timeframe, follow up with a phone call.
		<u>Language interpreter:</u> Some offices can provide a language interpreter if you request one. If the office is unable to provide one, request to bring your own.
		(3.1b) Where will the meeting take place?
	In-District	To meet with the Member in-district, schedule a meeting when Congress is not in session (typically end of July - August). Visit this link for the most up-to-date calendar. However, you can meet with their Member's district staff and still have an effective meeting.
	Remote	Zoom or video conferences are more common. You or the scheduler may suggest a remote meeting. Request the scheduler to set up the meeting logistics for you. A remote meeting is the most efficient way to meet, especially if a constituent is not physically located in the country, or, for other reasons, cannot be present for an in-person meeting, and/or you have an attorney who is from out of state.
		(3.2) Submit an online request*: "Help with a Federal Agency" *This service may vary based on how the Member shapes their constituent service operations
	Step 1	Go to the Member's website. Toggle to the navigation bar and hover over "Services". Under the dropdown menu, go to "Help with a Federal Agency". Once you are on the page, you will need to enter your zipcode to verify that you reside in their district. If they do not have an online form, call their office to request help with a federal agency.
	Step 2	You will be prompted to complete a Privacy Release form. The Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. § 552a) requires that Members of Congress or their staff have written authorization before they can obtain information about an individual's case. Additionally, the individual requiring assistance must be the one to fill out the authorization form. Authorization forms that have been completed by family or friends on the behalf of another person are not accepted.
	What to Expect After	A caseworker will contact you regarding your casework inquiry. They may ask you to share more information regarding your case. 1. (Highly recommended) Request to schedule a meeting with the caseworker to discuss your case 2. Request your case worker's direct contact information 3. Request your internal case tracking number

Prepare For Your Meeting

In-Person Meeting at the District Office

1. What to bring
 - a. (Recommended) Case Background Checklist and Constituent Narrative
 - b. (If you have it) A copy of your signed Privacy Release Form
2. Confirm the address and review instructions, if any, for entering the building
3. Arrive early and dress professionally, if possible
4. Practice the conversation:
 - a. What you want to share about your story
 - b. Make the ask! Request the Member to open a casework file and initiate an inquiry on your behalf
5. Review and confirm next steps

Remote / Online Meeting

1. At least a day before your meeting, make sure that your software is updated (Zoom, Teams, etc.)
2. On the day of your meeting, log into your account at least 30 minutes before the meeting begins to test the microphone and camera
3. Dress appropriately, if possible
4. Practice the conversation:
 - a. What you want to share about your story
 - b. Make the ask! Request the Member to open a casework file and initiate an inquiry on your behalf
5. Review and confirm next steps

Intake Checklist & Case Narrative Template

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Complete all pages (Checklist page and pages 1-8):** Fill out each section to the best of your ability, including this cover checklist page. Completing the entire packet ensures you build a full and organized case file that gives your representative everything they need to review your situation and open an official inquiry with the target federal agency.
2. **For in-person meetings:** If you plan to meet with the district staff in person, print out your completed pages, along with copies of your supporting documents to hand to the caseworker.
3. **For digital or remote submissions:** You can fill out and save these pages digitally. Then, email the completed file to your representative's office upon request. Be sure to double check that you are sending the packet to the correct email address.

CHECKLIST

- ☐ Constituent Information (page 1)
- ☐ Case Details (page 2-5)
- ☐ Case Timeline (page 6)
- ☐ Biography and Background Context (page 7-8)
- ☐ Information Needed to Fill Out the Congressional Privacy Release Form (Page 9)
- ☐ Attachments

- ☐ Copy of Privacy Release Form (if you have it)
- ☐ Written Agency Decisions or Documents. List them below:

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

List additional attachments you intend to share with the Member below:

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

CONSTITUENT INFORMATION

First Name		
Middle Name		
Last Name		
Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)		
Country of Birth		
A # (if you have one and know it)		
Current Address		
Phone Number		
Email Address		
Preferred Language		
Would you like to request a language interpreter?	☐ Yes	☐ No
If the Member's office is unable to arrange a language interpreter, can you provide your own?	☐ Yes	☐ No

CASE DETAILS

1. Which USCIS office is working on your case? If not applicable, please leave blank.

Name of USCIS Officer	
Phone Number	
Email	
Address Street Address, City, State, Zip Code	

Please provide the following information, if applicable:

- ☐ Application Form # _____
- ☐ Receipt Number _____
- ☐ Date(s) of Submission and/or Receipt Notice _____

2. Which ICE office is working on your case? If not applicable, please leave blank.

Name of ICE Officer	
Phone Number	
Email	
Address Street Address, City, State, Zip Code	

Please provide the following information, if applicable:

- ☐ Description of matter _____

Intake Checklist & Case Narrative Template: Case Details

3. Which CBP field office is working on your case? If not applicable, please leave blank.

Name of CBP Officer	
Phone Number	
Email	
Address Street Address, City, State, Zip Code	

Please provide the following information, if applicable:

☐ Description of matter _____

Intake Checklist & Case Narrative Template: Case Details

4. What is your current status or visa type in the U.S.? (Check one)

- ☐ Nonimmigrant Visa / Status (VAWA, U, V, T, Tourist, etc.)
- ☐ Temporary Protected Status (TPS)
- ☐ DACA
- ☐ Lawful Permanent Resident (Green Card Holder)
- ☐ U.S. Citizen
- ☐ Undocumented
- ☐ Pending Application (Describe: _____)
- ☐ Other: _____

5. Were you granted Deferred Action status?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

6. If yes, what was the basis of the Deferred Action?

7. Did you receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD)?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

8. If yes, what are the dates of validity of the EAD? _____

9. Do you have a final order of removal?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Intake Checklist & Case Narrative Template: Case Details

10. Did you request a stay of removal?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ N/A

If you answered yes, when did you request the stay of removal?

What was the outcome?

11. If you were removed, when were you removed? _____

12. If you were removed, where were you removed to? _____

13. To the best of your knowledge, please provide a timeline of your case on the next page (Titled: "Case Timeline"). An example is provided below:

Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	Event	Notes
10/16/2025	Attended ICE check in	ICE put an ankle monitor on me - this has never happened before. I have my check-in every 6 months. I told them I have Deferred Action and an EAD.
10/23/2025	Returned for another check in 1 week later and ICE arrested me	I was unable to contact my family for three days.
10/24/2025	Detained in Adelanto Detention Facility	I started to develop anxiety and I could not sleep.
10/27/2025	I was deported	I told ICE that I had Deferred Action. ICE did not let me see a judge.

Intake Checklist & Case Narrative Template: Case Timeline

CASE TIMELINE (If you need more space, please make a copy of this page to continue your timeline)

Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	Event	Notes

BIOGRAPHY AND BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Personal & Community Background:

- How many years have you lived in the U.S.?
- What is the make up of your family household? For example, do you have children or family members who are U.S. citizens and/or U.S. permanent residents?
- Are there others who rely on you? For example, are you the primary caregiver for a loved one? Are you the primary breadwinner for your household?
- Do you participate or volunteer with any local organizations (church, religious community, schools, etc.?)
- What is/was your employment status?

Personal and Community Background

BIOGRAPHY AND BACKGROUND CONTEXT (cont.)

Hardships: Briefly describe the hardships you and/or your loved ones have faced as a result of your circumstances. For example, were you a primary caregiver to an aging loved one? Did you provide the primary source of income for your household? How has your absence affected your workplace / religious community / volunteer community? What is the impact of your absence in your family, community, and/or workplace?

Hardships

PRIVACY RELEASE FORM

About the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. § 552a)

This act requires that Members of Congress or their staff have written authorization before they can obtain information about an individual's case. Each office has their own form that they will ask you to fill out before they can begin work; the forms are typically available on the Representative's website. Note that the individual requiring assistance must be the one to fill out the authorization form. Authorization forms that have been completed by family or friends on the behalf of another person are not accepted.

The questions below mirror information your Representative's form is likely to request. We recommend that you answer those questions in this template first, then copy and paste or attach it to the Privacy Release Form at the time of submission.

1. What is the current problem?

You can attach your biography and background context documents in lieu of re-writing this.

2. What steps have you taken to resolve the problem?

3. What has the federal agency told you? If you have a record of written agency decisions, provide a copy to the staffer.

4. Have you contacted any other office (elected officials, non-profits, attorneys, etc.) for assistance?

☐ Yes	Please specify:
☐ No	