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Practice Pointer: How To File Congressional Inquiries

The Trump administration closed the offices of the CIS Ombudsman, Department of Homeland Security Civil Right and Civil Liberties (CRCL), and Immigration Detention Ombudsman (OIDO) on March 21, 2025. Staff from these offices were placed on 60-day administrative leave. Individuals who have pending inquiries with these agencies should consider them closed, and they should be re-filed as congressional inquiries. This practice pointer will walk a practitioner through the process of filing a congressional inquiry and provide important links.

- ☐ Determine if the inquiry should be filed with your congressional representative or your senator. You might consider reaching out to other local organizations to see if some have had a better experience with one person versus another. Consider their stance on immigration issues to choose the best congressperson to send the request.
- ☐ Do not file inquiries with a senator and congressional representative simultaneously. This will likely slow down the process.
- ☐ Go to congress.gov to locate your congressional representative or senator.
    - Once on the website, go to the section called "Contact Your Member." (On the right-hand side of the page.)
    - Type your zip code into the search box titled "Find your Member by Address."
    - Press "search," and a list of potential Congress members will appear. You might need to do additional research to determine which congress members are the best fit for requesting assistance in your circumstance.
    - Alternatively:
        - ☐ Senators can be found on the Senate website by hovering over "senators," and selecting "Contact Your Senators."
        - ☐ Congressional representatives can be found on the U.S. House of Representatives website by entering a zip code into the "Find your Representative" search box at the top of the website page.

- ☐ Click on the name of the Congress member you wish to contact and navigate to that individual's webpage. (ex. https://massie.house.gov, https://www.padilla.senate.gov/contact/, etc.)
    - NOTE: Depending on which method you used to locate your Congress member, you might get to their website by clicking their photo, a link to the website connected to their name, or a link to something like "contact."
- ☐ Once you are on the website of your congressional representative or senator, there should be a section titled, "Services," "Issues," "Get Assistance," or something similar. Go to this section.
- ☐ In the services section, you should find an option such as "Help with a Federal Agency" or "Agency Assistance." Click on this link. It will provide you with instructions on how to file the congressional inquiry.
    - Each Congress person will have unique instructions for filing the inquiry, so it is important that you read instructions carefully. Changes in Congress members can also cause changes in the instructions. Even if you have filed an inquiry with an office previously, it is important to check the website for instructions before sending an inquiry.
- ☐ All inquiries will require the submission of a privacy release, which gives the Congress member permission to provide assistance on your client's case. **The Congress member will not be able to assist without this release.** The website should include information about how to complete the release of information.
- ☐ At some point, you will be asked to explain your problem and the outcome you are seeking. Here are a few tips to do that effectively:
    - Keep this explanation simple, cohesive, concise, and specific to the facts of your case.
    - Explain the attempts you have made to resolve the case with the appropriate agency. For example, "We filed Form I-130 on Jan. 3, 2023, (Receipt Number IOE1234567890). It has been pending for 26 months. This case is outside normal processing times. We contacted USCIS on Nov. 1, 2024, by E-Request (Confirmation Number 123456). We contacted USCIS on Jan. 1, 2025, by phone (Confirmation Number 123456). We have not received a response from USCIS. We are asking for your assistance with this case."
    - Make sure that you have relevant documents available and be ready to provide receipt numbers and other information.
    - Include/attach any relevant documents, where possible. (Note: some inquiries are completed over the phone).

- ☐ If the inquiry is completed online, you will likely get a confirmation email. Save the confirmation number/email for your records. If the inquiry is made telephonically, make sure that you are keeping detailed records of the date and time of your phone call and the person with whom you spoke. Make sure all information is recorded in the client's case file.