

Countering Anti-Immigrant Narratives

How to Organize Testimony at Local and State Legislative Hearings

Hateful, anti-immigrant rhetoric has become common place in the news cycle and in legislative bodies across our country. In order to combat the narrative, organizations serving immigrants must look for ways to safely amplify immigrant voices in their communities. Organizing clients and constituents to speak at legislative hearings on bills affecting immigrant rights may be particularly effective. Testifying allows lawmakers to learn about the knowledge, perspectives and experiences of people in their community. It may impact the way they understand an issue and, ultimately, their decisions in the lawmaking process.

What are legislative hearings?

Many times, before voting on a bill, lawmakers will hold hearings to gather information about the benefits and consequences of a piece of legislation. At a hearing, members of the legislature, government employees, technical experts and members of the public will speak on the record (testify) about the piece of legislation at hand. This information becomes part of an official record and lawmakers will use that information in the decision-making process.

How do I know when legislative hearings are being held?

State and local legislatures have public calendars with legislative hearing schedules. Look at your legislature's website for information.

How do I organize members/clients of my organization to attend hearings and testify?

- First, look for existing community advocates to partner with or assist—don't reinvent the wheel.
- Create a plan for how you will get out the word to your community before there is a piece of legislation or hearing scheduled. For example, you could organize an email list, text/phone chain or closed Facebook group to help people keep in touch.

- If there is a piece of legislation, put out a call to action using the communication tool you've set up. In your call to action, help people understand what the proposed piece of legislation will do. A closed Facebook event could be helpful to let people know when and where a hearing is happening and for you to gauge the number of supporters. Collaborate with other organizations in your community to ensure a big showing of support.
- Have your supporters wear a particular color and buttons/stickers to the hearings to visually represent your viewpoint. Signs are great too, but may not be permitted in the hearing.
- Prepare your supporters to deal with people attending the hearing who have an opposite viewpoint. People may be aggressive or try to intimidate them.
- If there is a piece of legislation proposed affecting immigrants, but no hearing scheduled, have members of your organization and community contact their representatives to request that a hearing or focus group be scheduled.

How do I organize people to testify?

- Think about people in your network who would provide compelling testimony. For example, people who are already active in the community and people who are most deeply impacted by the piece of legislation and understand the potential risks of testifying.
- Make sure you know the exact procedure for testifying ahead of time. Consult with existing organizers/advocates in the community, the bill's sponsor(s), or your representative for information. Information may also be available on your legislature's website.

Should people who are undocumented or the family members of undocumented people testify?

In order to testify, you may be required to give your name and possibly your address or other contact information. It becomes part of an official public record. If an undocumented person or family of an undocumented person gives their name and then identifies their immigration status, it may put them at risk.

A strategy to get around this may be to have a U.S. citizen in your organization deliver testimony on behalf of the person at risk, keeping them anonymous.

How should I help people prepare their testimony?

Testimony should be organized and to the point. In general, testimony should be somewhere between three and five minutes long. People testifying should write out what they will say ahead of time and practice to ensure they speak clearly and persuasively. Here are some tips for developing testimony:

- Introduce yourself and begin with a clear, one-sentence issue statement. For example, “My name is XYZ and I have lived in this community for XYZ years. I am here testifying for/against XYZ bill because X, Y, and Z.”
- Organize your testimony argument by argument. You may want to number each argument on the paper to help keep you organized.
- Do research! Legislators may not have heard about specific studies and may do additional research based on your suggestions.
- Think about what questions you might be asked and develop additional talking points if necessary to have as a back up.
- Make it personal. Talk about the impact the piece of legislation or the issue has on your life.
- Conclude by summarizing your arguments. For example, “In conclusion, I ask that you vote/do not vote for this bill because of X, Y, and Z. Thank you.”
- Use respectful language and a respectful tone. It will make you much more effective.

What are some other strategies for organizations to influence state and local legislatures?

Lobby day

Typically, a lobby day involves multiple members of an organization meeting with their respective representatives about a particular piece of legislation or issue. You can call lawmakers and request meetings ahead of time or go to their offices and request a meeting in person the day of your event. If you are not able to meet with the lawmaker, meeting with a member of the staff is also effective. A lobby day can be combined with a protest or demonstration but one-on-one conversations between lawmakers and the people they represent should be emphasized. Strategies will depend on the political climate and issue at hand. As always, if you are organizing immigrants to participate in a lobby day, consider safety concerns.

Meet with lawmakers and build a relationship

When meeting with lawmakers, make sure to have a specific agenda. Introduce your organization, its value in the community and be clear about what you want. If applicable, bring materials to leave with lawmakers about your organization’s work. Ask lawmakers and their staff for their thoughts on the issue and their advice on how to promote your agenda. Ideally, keeping in contact with lawmakers leads to a mutually beneficial relationship. Lawmakers should listen to your ideas and concerns and you should be a resource for them as experts in their community. Make it clear to the lawmakers’ staff that they can reach out to you for questions or other needs. Additionally, invite lawmakers and their staff to visit your church, office, etc. to facilitate conversations with your members or constituents. Make sure to keep an eye on your lawmaker’s schedule and attend town halls and other events they hold.

Related CLINIC resource

Stay Up To Date on Your State's Political Process: cliniclegal.org/resources/stay-date-your-states-political-process

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Using Social Media

Social media is a valuable tool for promoting pro-immigrant messages and community-building beyond geographic constraints. If your organization does not have its own Facebook or Twitter page, now would be a great time to start one. Be sure to keep safety in mind as you use social media—you do not want to identify people as undocumented or the family members of undocumented people.

Share pro-immigrant narratives

Using Facebook and Twitter, you can share and circulate pro-immigrant stories and information about your work with your followers. Although your followers may only be people who share your organization's viewpoint, keeping these people engaged and informed is very important. Using social media consistently will make it more likely that your followers will respond to a call to action in an emergency. Information you share can help people in combating anti-immigrant voices online and in person.

Learn from the opposition

Although your followers may generally agree with your viewpoint, social media does give you an opportunity to see what a wide range of people are sharing and discussing regarding immigration. Learning more about what the other side is thinking is a valuable opportunity to help you in crafting and framing more effective narratives.

Use Facebook events and groups to organize

Facebook events can be a great tool to organize advocacy events. They can help you to gauge interest and get out information. Groups can allow you to share information, learn about what other organizations are doing and build communities beyond your immediate vicinity. Use privacy options to keep events/groups secret if there are safety concerns.

Connect with state and local legislators and local media outlets through social media

Following local and state lawmakers and local media outlets on social media is a great way to keep informed and connected about local issues. At meetings or events with lawmakers who support immigrant rights, make sure to request a photo and permission to share it on your social media page.

Hashtags and social media campaigns

Using hashtags and participating in social media campaigns allows your organization to show solidarity with immigrants and immigrants' rights organizations across the country and beyond. You can also use these tools locally. For example, a local hashtag or social media campaign in support of or against a piece of legislation or policy can send a strong message and help lawmakers better understand their communities. If you're using social media as part of an advocacy strategy, make sure to connect the dots by calling local legislative offices to make sure they've seen the support. You can also use social media numbers in press releases or in other communications with local media outlets.

Photos and graphics

Social media gives you the valuable opportunity to share your narrative through both words and images. Graphics/images can help people with different learning styles better understand concepts and issues and can be used to brand and create visibility for a campaign. Photos can humanize and make stories resonate in a way that words alone cannot. Always keep safety in mind.

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Working with Local Media

Engaging with local media is an effective way to amplify local immigrant voices and combat hateful narratives. As always, safety must be carefully evaluated and prioritized. When interacting with the media, it is safer for an undocumented person or U.S. citizen family member of an undocumented person to stay anonymous or use a pseudonym.

Strategies for writing effective op-eds

- Newspapers will generally have guidelines for writing and submitting op-eds. Be sure to read those carefully before you start writing.
- Consider your message: Who is your audience? What do you want your piece to say? What story do you want to tell? Write your message down so you can continue to refer back to it and stay focused.
- Think about the arguments. Numbering your arguments in an outline may help you keep organized and write more effectively.
- Make it personal and connect to a real person, whether that person is the author or someone whose situation is being described. This will challenge people to think about immigrants and the issues they are facing in a new light.
- Make it local. If you're writing for a local publication, think about ways to tie your piece to someone who lives in the community or something happening there.

How to write a press release and pitch a story to local media

- Develop a list of local media outlets and their contact information. This should include newspaper, radio, television and other local publications. Ideally, you will want to contact a news editor or producer for an event and an editorial page editor for an op-ed. Also gather the outlet's Twitter, Facebook and other social media contacts.
- If you want press coverage at an event, start with a media advisory. A media advisory should be

extremely short. In a paragraph or two, describe the event and when and where it is happening. Describe why it is relevant and why it would be of interest. Send the advisory to the media outlet when you have the details, up to a week before the event. Resend the information the day before the event, first thing in the morning.

- The next step if you want media coverage at an event or if you want to pitch a story is to write a press release. A press release should be no longer than one page.
 - » Start with a clear headline and topic sentence to grab the reader's attention. Try to get at who, what, where, when and why. In other words, how would you summarize your entire story in one sentence?
 - » Describe what is new, relevant and local about your story. Illustrate why readers/listeners/viewers would be interested and why the story is important.
 - » Weave quotes sharing personal experience and reactions into your press release.
- Send your press release by email. In the subject line, state that it is a media advisory or press release and include your headline.
- After sending an advisory to announce an event, you generally should send a press release explaining the content the day of the event, as early in the morning as possible. If your event is early in the morning, you could do this the day before.
- Next, call the media outlets to confirm that they received your press release. Write down a short pitch to read or refer to while speaking to a reporter. If you don't have a direct contact to a news editor or reporter, you should ask to be connected to the "newsroom."
- Have a one-page sheet about your organization prepared in case the reporter requests it.
- Build relationships with local media. Make it clear that you're available to them as a resource.



CATHOLIC LEGAL
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National Catholic organizations oppose executive orders that affect immigrants and refugees

The Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., along with the Center for Migration Studies, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services, Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, will hold a press conference in response to the recent immigration-related executive orders issued by President Trump.

We believe many of these measures are destructive to families and our communities and contrary to Catholic social teaching. We will fight these policies and continue to honor our mission serving immigrants and refugees.

When Feb. 1, 2017

Where Casa Italiana at Holy Rosary Church
595 3rd St, NW
Washington, DC, 20002

Time 11 a.m.

Speakers will include:

Sister Donna Markham O.P., president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA

Jeanne Atkinson, executive director, Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.

Bill Canny, executive director, Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Don Kerwin, executive director, Center for Migration Studies

Rebecca Sawyer, vice president, Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

Jill Marie Gerschutz Bell, senior legislative specialist, Catholic Relief Services

Representatives of additional Catholic organizations that work with immigrants or refugees or advocate on their behalf are expected to be in attendance and available for interviews.

For information contact:

Patricia Zapor, CLINIC, 301-565-4830 or Rachel Reyes, Center for Migration Studies, 212-337-3080

CLINIC advocates for humane and just immigration policy. Its network of nonprofit immigration programs—more than 300 organizations in 47 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico—is the largest in the nation.

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Refugee order closes door to vulnerable refugees

January 27, 2017

SILVER SPRING, Maryland – President Trump signed an executive order Jan. 27 that erodes the United States’ commitment to the protection of refugees, weakens our country’s security, and harms our standing in the international community. “At a time when war and persecution have driven more people to flee in search of safety than any other time in modern history, we need to protect refugees rather than reject them out of misplaced fear,” said Jeanne Atkinson, executive director of CLINIC.

Among other effects, the order would halt the refugee resettlement program for 120 days, reduce by more than half the number of refugees resettled in 2017 to 50,000, suspend the resettlement of Syrian refugees, and suspend immigration from several Muslim majority countries.

“We call for the administration to protect refugees of all faiths and reject the idea of limiting resettlement of our Muslim brothers and sisters. We must continue our policy of protecting the most vulnerable refugees,” Atkinson said. “Operating out of fear does not serve the nation’s interests. In fact, refugee resettlement serves the nation’s security interests. In addition to intellect, ambition, and an ethic of hard work, refugees often bring language and cultural skills needed by our national security agencies.”

The refugee resettlement process includes extensive security checks performed by the Department of Defense, the FBI, the National Counterterrorism Center, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State.

“Refugees have enriched our society in countless ways. These newcomers seek protection and the promise of equality, opportunity and liberty that has made our country thrive. When we reject refugees, we negate the welcome that was given to so many of our ancestors,” said Bishop Kevin W. Vann, chairman of CLINIC’s board of directors and head of the Diocese of Orange in California.

Today, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, we should reflect on the lessons of the past. We stand with the international community who will now bear greater responsibility for protecting the world’s most vulnerable people. We pray that they will honor their commitment to give a home to those who flee unspeakable atrocities.

Many of CLINIC’s 300 affiliates doing immigration legal services work also help resettle refugees and assist them with integration into the United States, such as by offering naturalization programs.

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