

IF AMERICANS KNEW - LOCAL

What every American needs to know about Israel/Palestine

Telling Congress that PALESTINE MATTERS: some tips

(If Americans Knew is a news and information organization, not a lobbying resource, but we've collected a few tips and suggestions to help you get started if you're new to advocacy. If you have tips or experiences to share – things that worked or things that didn't work – please send them to us at localvolunteers@ifamericansknew.org.)

It's not enough anymore to vote once every two or four years. We can't assume our representatives know what we want them to do, and we can't expect them to do what's right. Most likely, they are being pressured by lobbies, their party, and noisy special interest groups.

If you've spent any time around the Israel/Palestine issue, you know how true this is – AIPAC, the Israel lobby, is one of the [most powerful advocacy orgs](#) in Washington.

Israel lobbyists and partisans aren't going to give Congress members the facts. We need to do that.

Email and Twitter are typical ways to make our voices heard – but they're not the most effective way. *Some of us need to take it to the next level!*

Get to know the issue and the legislation

The issue:

Once you've decided to step up your support for Palestinian children, the first task is to get to know what the kids are facing. You can read reports [here](#) and [here](#). A few facts you may want to memorize or keep in your pocket:

- Each year the Israeli military detains and prosecutes around [700 Palestinian children](#)!
- Israel has arrested about [50,000 Palestinian children](#) since 1967!
- Palestinian children can be sentenced up to [20 years](#) for throwing a stone!
- Palestinian parents and textbooks [don't teach](#) their children to hate Jews!
- Israel is the only country in the world that [systematically prosecutes children](#) in military courts that lack fundamental fair trial rights and protections!

The legislation:

You don't need a deep understanding of constitutional law – just the basics of this bill. You can read about H.R.2407 [here](#) and [here](#).

Has your rep already cosponsored the bill? Find out [here](#). (If yes, just drop a note to thank them!)

Is your rep a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs that is studying the bill? Find out [here](#). (If yes, they have a say in whether the bill lives or dies.)

Decide what you want to say

It's a great idea to prepare an "elevator speech" – what you'd say if you had the opportunity to talk for 1-2 minutes about Palestinian children. What are you fighting for, in a couple of sentences? What will be the result if this bill is not passed? Why is it important to all Americans? And what do you want listeners to do? (Yup, all that in under 2 minutes!)

Consider finding a personal connection that makes you care about H.R.2407. Do you have or know a child who was traumatized or bullied? Have you ever been treated unjustly by the system? Or does this issue just break your heart – as many hearts are broken over the situation at the US/Mexico border?

We have a [fact sheet](#) you can use if you're short on time, as well as a [phone script](#) and other materials. It's fine to have a script for a phone call – just try to speak as naturally as possible.

Make the call

According to [Emily Ellsworth](#), a six-year veteran of Congressional assisting, *phone calls give a lot more bang for the buck than social media and email.*

Engage the staffer as you talk – make it more of a conversation than a lecture.

Any individual who makes a call (*call the district offices, not DC offices*) is doing well – but when possible, a coordinated effort can make a real impression. A large number of calls will get more attention.

Calling etiquette

When you call, inform the person on the other end that you have a message for them to convey to your rep. They'll ask for your address, and then you can say your piece. Be sure to finish with The Ask: "please tell the Congressman/woman to cosponsor H.R.2407." Always be polite and respectful.

The more, the merrier

Why keep this to yourself? Find some friends and acquaintances willing to take just a few minutes to call. Make sure everyone has a [fact sheet](#) and start dialing. Depending on how many volunteers you have, you might disrupt your Congress member's district office for half an hour, or half a day. Coordinate with others (orgs and community groups that care about human rights), and take one hour each. Share the district office phone number on social media to make it easy for people to call.

When a district office gets a large quantity of phone calls on the same topic, you can bet they will notice. The staff will tell the legislator which direction the callers want him/her to go on the issue. The rep may release a position statement or move on a bill – or not, but we have to try! *At a minimum, you get the issue on his/her radar. That's a victory!*

Teachable moment

If your call is answered by an intern, they may not be familiar with the issue. That's a great opportunity to educate. Ask if they have a minute to hear some background, and then give your elevator speech. And/or offer to send them a link to a really good article.

Or you can ask to talk to a senior staffer who may be more well-versed about the legislator's position on the issue.

Time your action

When Palestine is in the news, that's a great time to do something. Especially when Israel is doing something blatantly unjust (and TBH that's pretty much every day), it's a natural opportunity to advocate for justice.

Knowing when committees meet and other actions are scheduled for your bill is a big help (you can track the progress of bills [here](#)).

But also, anytime is a good time to make your voice heard – and you can call as often as you like. Remember, you are paying your rep's salary. He/she works for you!

Nothing beats face-to-face

For those willing to go beyond the phone, an in-person meeting with your legislator's staffer (or if you're lucky, the legislator him/herself) is worth the effort.

Going as a group instead of alone can send a message about the importance of the issue. Decide ahead of time who is going to talk about what, and make sure everyone is at least somewhat familiar with the issue. (We have a [visit script](#) that you can use, or create your own.)

It's generally recommended to request a meeting 2-4 weeks in advance; you can usually expect to get a maximum of 15 minutes.

Start by asking your rep (or staffer), "Are you familiar with H.R.2407?" Find out what they know and what misunderstandings they might have (for example, they may think the bill is anti-Semitic or singles out Israel).

When it's your turn to talk, use your elevator speech, and be sure to address these false impressions. (Even if they don't mention antisemitism or singling out, they're probably thinking it, so you should talk about it! Here's a good discussion of the [antisemitism myth](#), and one on singling out can be found in [this article](#).)

You might want to bring a laptop and show one of the [short films](#) from the *No Way To Treat a Child* website as part of your presentation. Also bring a [fact sheet](#) on the topic to leave behind,

and perhaps some more general info on the Palestinian issue (you might choose some of the many reports found [here](#)).

You may love your rep, or hate him/her, but now is not the time to talk politics. Stick to the topic, and focus on being persuasive and warm. Remember: your job is to educate and provide resources to empower your legislator to make the right choice (whether or not he/she uses it).

Be sure to get to The Ask: “will you cosponsor H.R.2407?”

Then listen. If your rep has genuine questions or concerns, keep the conversation going. If he/she shuts you down, you have a right to ask why.

Then listen some more – even if you get a flat No, you can gain valuable insight into how your rep thinks. It may come in handy in the future. Your objective isn’t necessarily to get to Yes, but to *educate*. Don’t argue – we have the moral high ground on this issue: the facts speak for themselves. After we state the facts clearly, it’s up to the rep to do the right thing.

At the end of the session, thank them, get their business card (that way you may get a more direct phone or email) and be sure to ask for a photo!

Then, a few days later, drop them a thank-you email – including answers to any questions they raised. Offer to be a resource if they ever need info on the issue.

Other opportunities

It’s a great idea to go to town hall meetings or other events where you’ll be able to see your rep in person. Again, there is power in numbers. (Check your rep’s website regularly and get on their mailing list so you can hear about these events.) If nothing is scheduled, you should remind the staffer that your rep ought to hold regular public meetings so he/she can connect with the constituents. Use good [“bird dog” techniques](#).

If you are going to see your rep in person, have a very short statement/Ask ready (and someone to video tape) and do your best to get a minute of face-to-face time. (See how [IfNotNow](#) folks have been [doing](#) this [recently](#).) You can also talk to staffers at these events.

If they’re willing to go on record at all with a comment – even a negative comment – that’s a victory. It gives us a roadmap for moving forward:

- if they’re favorable, we pressure them in a positive way to become a cosponsor (and then keep the positive pressure going so they don’t chicken out!)
- if they’re against the bill, we put them in the pressure cooker (we’ll be offering ideas for this soon)
- if they’re undecided, we educate them

Here’s something else you can do: take a few minutes to turn your elevator speech into an op-ed or letter to the editor for your local newspaper. Your Ask in this case will be a request for your community to join you in contacting your rep. And you can bet your rep will see the article – they’re always scanning the local papers to see how constituents feel. (With a two-year term, there’s always an election right around the corner!)

If you want to write a snail-mail letter, here are some [tips](#) from the National Confectioners Association. You can find your rep's individual address [here](#), or just use the main address,
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

We will be sharing other ideas from groups that have experience advocating for Palestine. You might dream up something great too – try it and tell us how it goes!

Remember, it's up to us to change the conversation. Your efforts are key to your district, and our collective efforts will make a difference.