

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF COLUMBIA, MD

Immigration Advocacy Team

HOW TO ADVOCATE EFFECTIVELY



A Front View of the State-House &c. at ANNAPOLIS the Capital of MARYLAND.

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Introduction

Advocacy. It's written into the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment: "the right of the people to peaceably assemble and to petition the government..." And anyone can be an advocate. It takes passion for a cause, some knowledge about it, perhaps a personal connection and a few helpful tips.



In our Unitarian Universalist Fifth Principle we affirm that all persons have the right to participate in the democratic process, including speaking, writing and visiting their elected or appointed officials, policymakers and other government employees about issues that concern them. Our participation can take several forms: voting, campaigning for a candidate, donating to a political campaign or party and advocacy.

Being an advocate is not a full-time job. Sometimes, it can take only a few minutes to type your name and address into a prepared internet form and press the submit button. or you might spend a few minutes cutting and pasting suggested text into an email message, or you'll spend a few more minutes writing a personal letter to your legislator. If you have the time, you might schedule an appointment for a personal visit with your legislator. You might make a telephone call, but you're likely to speak with a staff member. That's okay. Your message is being heard.

To be effective advocates we will need a strategy and must be familiar with the tools, techniques and mechanics of advocacy

Tips for Effective Immigration Advocacy

1. Get to know your legislator or policy-maker

Find out who your legislator is. If you're not sure, visit:

[For Maryland General Assembly \(Senate and House of Delegates\)](#)

[For Maryland Governor](#)

[For Maryland Attorney General](#)

[For Maryland Counties](#)

[For U.S. Representative](#)

[For U.S. Senators](#)

[For President of the United States \(The White House\)](#)

[For U.S. Attorney General \(Department of Justice\)](#)

[For Secretary of U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#)

2. Sign Up for Your Legislators' Newsletters

Take advantage of the newsletters, usually online, email or text messaging that your legislators may offer. Also, make sure that you receive email alert messages from UULM-MD.

3. Learn About the Issue through Partner Organizations and Sign Up for Alerts

UULM-MD's Immigration Task Force will monitor state, national and local legislation as well as the regulatory process to track bills and notices of proposed rulemaking that affect immigration and migrant rights. **(BIG HINT: If you are interested in being a monitor, contact Jim Caldiero, jimcal87@gmail.com.)** We will partner with other local and state-wide groups that seek to influence public policy to protect our immigrant neighbors. These groups routinely monitor legislation in the Maryland General Assembly and state executive branch agencies charged with implementing immigration-related laws and issuing regulations.

Some of these groups issue action alerts which we will distill and send to interested members of via email messages.

Alternatively, if you prefer, you can sign up with these advocacy groups to receive email alerts about upcoming legislative and regulatory action. Some of these are national organizations with local chapters or deal with issues that transcend Maryland, but may serve as an information resource. Of course, you may prefer not to be inundated with multiple email messages. You can rely on those who have volunteered to serve as Legislative Monitors who will summarize the information in email messages. The alerts will offer you the opportunity to act. These organizations are:

- [UU Service Committee \(monitoring migrant rights and climate-forced displacement\)](#)
- [UU's for Social Justice \(monitoring national legislation\)](#)
- [Unitarian Universalist Association \(partnerships\)](#)
- [National Immigration Law Center](#)
- [American Immigration Council](#)
- [Stand with Immigrants \(Legislation\)](#)
- [National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights \(Legislation\)](#)
- [American Civil Liberties Union-Maryland \(Civil Rights\)](#)
- [CASA Maryland](#)
- [DMV Sanctuary Congregation Network](#)
- [Friends of Latin America](#)

When we identify a significant issue, you will receive an action alert. The alert, most likely, may contain a link to the website of one of the organization's listed above where you can submit a prepared message to your legislators. You may also receive an alert from UULM-MD's Immigration Task Force. You may have the option of writing your own message.

4. Construct a Message to an Elected Official (Letter, Email)

You can write to any of your elected officials—county, state, national legislators, county executives, governors, presidents as well as policy-makers in government agencies, for example Cabinet Secretaries, Attorney General. You can mail your letter, fax it or send an email message.



- Keep your message short, not longer than one page, stick to one issue. Make it timely; for example, while the bill is under consideration in

committee (if your legislator is on the committee) or when it is scheduled for a floor vote; notices of proposed rulemaking have deadlines.

- Be sure to use the proper form of address and the correct spelling of the official's name. See Forms of Address, below.
- Identify yourself as a constituent. Identify the organization you are part of or represent. If you are a public employee, make sure you state that you are writing as a constituent and private citizen (to avoid Hatch Act or other statutes and regulations). If have relevant professional qualifications, state them.
- Explain the purpose of your message at early and whether you are pleased or concerned about it. Mention that you are seeking the officials support or opposition.
- Personalize the message. Is there a personal story that you can relate about the issue? Explain how the bill or proposed regulation affects you or your community or others
- The message may include information that the official may not have or suggest an alternative, particularly if you are opposed to the bill or regulation.
- If you offer any supporting evidence, please make sure it is accurate.
- Acknowledge any past support by the official
- Reiterate the action you hope the official will take on the issue and that you would like a reply.
- Ask if there is any way you or your group can help.
- Close the message. You may, for example, include your degrees with your signature.

Forms of Address

Many websites give examples of the appropriate forms of address for elected officials and other public officials, such as cabinet secretaries. Addresses will be found on officials' websites, such as [Governor Hogan's](#), [the White House](#), agency websites such as the [Department of Homeland Security](#), [Department of Justice](#), [Maryland Attorney General](#), and legislature websites such as [Congress.gov](#), the [Maryland General Assembly](#) and the Maryland County Councils.

Official forms of address: [Emily Post Institute](#)

A Sample Letter/Message

*Hon. Robert Flanagan
Maryland House of Delegates
430 House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401*

Dear Delegate Flanagan,

As a constituent and a member of the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland, a faith-based advocacy group representing thousands of Marylanders, my faith in the inherent worth and dignity of every person calls me to urge you to vote for House Bill 1536 that extends the DREAM Act.

As you know, the General Assembly in 2012 enacted the DREAM Act that allowed undocumented Marylanders, known as Dreamers, who attend a Maryland high school for at least three years and graduate or receive the equivalent of a high school diploma to pay the same tuition rates that resident students pay. Current law also states that students are required to begin at a Maryland community college in the same district as the high school they graduated from. Once the student completes 60 credits, they may enroll at a public four-year institution and pay in-state tuition.

The new bill removes the district and credit requirements, allowing students to directly enter any public state college or university, pay the in-state tuition rate at any Maryland public college or university or the in-county rate at any community college, regardless of whether they live in that county. It also extends the period of eligibility from four to six years after graduating from high school.

The nearly 10,000 Dreamers who can benefit from this program are estimated to contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to the Maryland economy. These young people have only known Maryland as their home and should be afforded the same benefits and privileges that all young Marylanders deserve.

Please let me know how I can help you to get this bill passed. You can reach me at email ... phone (land) ... or (cell) ...

Thank you.

Very Truly Yours,

James C....

5. Call an Elected Official

Don't be disappointed if you don't speak with your elected official or policy-maker. They are, after all, busy people and we pay for them to have staff to handle our calls as part of their constituent services. Many legislators, particularly U.S. senators and representatives have hotlines where you can leave a message registering your opinion on a bill. You may speak directly with a member of a state legislator's staff, which is smaller than a U.S. Senator's or Representative's.



Start your call by identifying yourself. **“Hello, my name is ___ and I live [your address]. Please let [Senator/Delegate, etc.] know that I support/oppose [bill title and number] and urge him/her to vote for/against this bill because [give one or two reasons, briefly].”**

If you want to discuss the bill more fully, ask for a call back.

6. Meet with an Elected Official or Policy-maker

Face-to-face meetings with officials are an effective means of influencing public policy. But, as noted in the previous tip, these officials are busy people and you may meet with a staff person instead. That's okay. The staff person may be an expert on the issue and know more than the legislator. (That's usually the case.)

While in graduate school, my *Budgetary Politics and Process* professor told us a story about a U.S. senator with limited knowledge on a subject and a staff person whom the senator routinely treated badly. After a particularly bad day, the staff person had to write a speech for the senator's evening event. The staff person wrote the speech, providing expert information, but on the last line of the first page of the speech, he wrote "and one final word." When the senator read that line before a packed house and turned to the next page, he was confronted with: "You're on your own, you son of a ---"

To request a personal meeting with your legislator, send a letter, fax or call the office for an appointment.

- Make sure you include in your letter or call that you are a constituent and the subject of your meeting.
- If you don't get a confirming response in a few days, follow up with another letter or phone call.
- If your appointment is confirmed, send a confirmation letter or call to the office.
- Arrive on time.
- Don't be nervous.
- You may bring one or two friends, neighbors, colleagues, your group participants with you who are familiar with the issue and may contribute to the discussion.
- Have prepared talking points, perhaps a fact sheet that you can refer to.
- Provide any documents and evidence that may help persuade the official or staff person.
- Make sure you are informed and prepared to answer questions.
- Volunteer to help on the issue, assuming the legislator supports your position.
- Leave contact information, a business card, perhaps the fact sheet or talking points that you referenced. Agree to send any additional information that may have been requested.
- Thank the official and staff person.
- Send a follow-up thank you along with any additional information that was requested

7. Testify or Offer a Written Statement



If you are confident about the issue you may consider testifying before a state legislative committee or the County Council. You also have the option of submitting written testimony. Contact the state legislative committee or the County Council about the procedures for registering to testify or submitting a written statement and if there are any specific formats required. Note that if you plan to testify, you will be asked to submit your remarks for the written record.

In general, oral and written testimony should be brief, stipulate your position (for or against) and contain supporting evidence.

If you testify, you should address legislators' concerns and interests, if known. Be polite. Be positive. Speak clearly, make eye contact and do not exceed your allotted time. Avoid jargon, don't be overly technical or too detailed. When you write your full statement, prepare a summary with your major talking points that you can use for your oral testimony and then submit the full statement for the written record. This way, you'll be sure to get all your points across and not exceed the time limit.

8. Convince Others

Advocacy isn't just about influencing public policy. It's about persuading our neighbors to do the right thing. You might have the opportunity to persuade, perhaps at a worship service, a community event, a public meeting. These venues are great to inform your neighbors, raise awareness about the issue, maybe get some press coverage.

When given the opportunity:

- Be relaxed
- Try to be informal
- Make sure you the information you present is accurate
- Make sure you have some of your group and supporters present
- As with testimony, be brief, speak clearly, try to make eye contact, avoid jargon and technical detail
- Keep your talking points to about three and no more than seven and speak briefly to each one
- Make sure you have printed copies available with contact information
- If you plan to use a projector, make sure your laptop is compatible and that you have the correct cables.

Sometimes you will have the opportunity to staff a table at an event. When given the opportunity:

- Prepare an attractive display; these can be done cheaply with a tri-fold cardboard display
- Use color copies on your display and for handouts
- Make sure your information is accurate
- Keep your "talking points" to about three and no more than seven

- Make sure you have a partner to handle multiple inquiries simultaneously and to provide relief
- Make sure you have a sign-up sheet to get names and email addresses of interested individuals
- Make sure your handouts have contact information

9. Follow the Law

Because of our proximity to our nation's capital, some members of our congregations are federal employees whose participation in advocacy and how they relate to elected officials are governed by statute and regulation. If you are a federal employee (as I used to be) or MD state employee check with your agency's ethics officer to determine the limits of your advocacy efforts.

Of course, the First Amendment of the Constitution protects your right to participate in the democratic process. When advocating for our immigrant neighbors, particularly when contacting your legislators, make certain that you identify yourself as a concerned citizen expressing your own opinion. Under no circumstances are you to use your office phone, photocopier, fax, personal computer, paper, pens or any other equipment for your advocacy efforts, even after working hours. The smart and safe thing to do is to contact your agency ethics officer.

If you are not employed by the United States or Maryland, please make certain that you advocate for the issue and not a candidate for public office.

10. Use Social Media

As you are aware, UULM-MD communicates via its website, email messaging, Twitter (Tweets) and Facebook. Our partner organizations, no doubt have similar digital methods and many of us will individually use them. But the primary advocacy vehicle will be email messaging.

To the extent there is interest, our Immigration Task Force members may wish to participate in some form of file sharing such as Google Groups. Documents may be shared with interested individuals via a personal Google Drive or Microsoft OneDrive. The advantage is that you don't have to send email messages with large attached files and every individual doesn't have to store the same file on her personal computer or cloud account. This file sharing technology is how some of you may get this document.

Sources

Much of the information presented here is derived from several sources, among them the American Public Health Association, the University of Kansas, the Illinois Library Association, American Chemical Society, the Sierra Club. United Nations Association of the USA, Natural Resource Defense Council, UU's for Social Justice.

Conclusion

Political Scientist Richard Neustadt wrote that "presidential power is the power to persuade." The same holds true for every American citizen. Our power lies not only in exercising the

franchise, but in convincing our public officials to implement policies that are beneficial to our immigrant neighbors and to our nation and the world. Advocacy is persuasion; it is arguing coherently, forcefully, passionately for a cause—for the rights of all human beings.

For More Information and To Learn About Opportunities

For more information about UULM-MD's Immigration Task Force and for opportunities such as becoming a Legislative Monitor, representing the Task Force in your congregation or organization, and more, contact Jim Caldiero, jimcal87@gmail.com

Disclaimer

Any errors of omission or commission are mine. /s/ Jim Caldiero