How to approach candidates & elected officials

Engaging members of Congress takes many forms, including personal interactions in public settings. Developing skills and practicing interventions with elected officials have proven helpful in the No Way to Treat a Child campaign’s advocacy efforts and for many other social justice causes. This guide is meant to help you prepare to make the most of engaging in public settings.

General tips

Raising a question or making a comment to a candidate or elected official in a public setting can be done for different purposes, including:

1. **Education.** The official may be hearing your information for the first time and may become more interested (especially if they see it as an important issue to a constituent). Even if they have heard about the issue a lot, it is good to show the issue remains important.

2. **Public platform.** You have an opportunity to educate not just the official, but also the broader audience gathered when you speak. Sometimes the media will be present and may include your question in their coverage. Generally, questions will be included in the notes by a Congressperson’s staff at town hall events or public meetings, so asking a question here may also help with your follow up communications.

3. **On the record.** Ask your official to take a stand—yes or no—on ensuring taxpayer money is not used to detain Palestinian children in Israeli prisons. Then ask them to explain why or why not they take this position. It helps to have the conversation recorded, so document your encounter!

Consider your target

**Target already cosponsors H.R. 2407 in Congress »**

Goals:

- Educate your community on violations against Palestinian children detained and prosecuted in Israel’s military court system and H.R. 2407
- Thank your elected official for signing on as a cosponsor
- Get your elected official on the record speaking about the issue and why they felt it was important to sign on

Sample questions:

“Thank you for supporting children’s rights, including ensuring that no American tax money is used by Israeli forces to ill-treat Palestinian child detainees. Thousands of Palestinian children have been detained and prosecuted in Israel’s military court system that lacks fundamental fair trial rights and protections. Each year, our government provides over $3.8 billion in military funding to Israel with little oversight or monitoring. As your constituent, I’m proud that you cosponsored H.R. 2407, a bill led by Rep. Betty McCollum, that would prohibit our tax dollars from...
supporting human rights abuses against children. Can you say what motivated you to cosponsor this bill in Congress?”

“HR 2407 is a bill that promotes justice, equality and human rights of Palestinian children, who face widespread ill treatment in Israel’s military court system, including detention without basic rights protections for all children. Thank you for cosponsoring this bill and speaking up for human rights. Can you say what motivated you to speak up for the rights of Palestinian children in Congress?”

 “[Lead with your own short personal story/experience, i.e. “I have been to Palestine...”; “As a Palestinian...”; “As a supporter of Palestinian rights...”; etc.], I am outraged that my government provides $3.8 billion a year to the Israeli government that routinely violates the rights of Palestinians, including the ill-treatment and detention of Palestinian children in a military court system that lacks basic rights and protections. Thank you for supporting H.R. 2407, a bill that would ensure no U.S. tax money is used by governments, including Israel, to ill-treat and detain children in a military court system. Can you share why you cosponsored this important bill in Congress?”

**Target is sympathetic but not an H.R. 2407 cosponsor »**

**Goals:**

- Ensure they know about H.R. 2407 and constituent support for the bill
- Get an “on the record” commitment from the candidate or elected official to:
  1. Learn more about H.R. 2407
  2. Meet with concerned constituents to discuss H.R. 2407
  3. Cosponsor H.R. 2047 or promise to cosponsor if elected
- Illustrate the candidate or elected official’s double standard/hypocrisy for fellow constituents

**Sample questions:**

“I am a constituent who has come to rely on you for taking principled positions in Congress, especially when it comes to human rights and caring for those most vulnerable, including children. I would like to see you support H.R. 2407, a bill sponsored by Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN-04), promoting the human rights of Palestinian children and ensuring that none of the $3.8 billion we provide to the Israeli government each year is used to detain and abuse Palestinian children. Will you commit to signing this bill? [Will you commit to meeting with concerned constituents to discuss this important bill?]”

“When children were detained in cages at the U.S. border, you justifiably spoke out against this abuse. I am hoping today you will also commit to standing up for the rights of children prosecuted in military courts, where fair trial rights are not protected. In fact, human rights organizations and institutions such as UNICEF, Human Rights Watch and our own US State Department have documented widespread abuse of Palestinian children by Israeli forces as they are detained and prosecuted in Israel’s military court system. Our government should not provide $3.8 billion in unconditional military funding to countries that routinely commit human rights violations. Will you support H.R. 2407, a bill introduced by Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN-04) that ensures no U.S. funds support violations against children?”
Target is hostile to the issue »

Goals:

• Educate your community about the issue of Palestinian children detained and prosecuted in Israel’s military court system and H.R. 2407

• Draw attention to your Representative’s contempt/hostility towards Palestinian children’s rights

Sample questions:

“I am a constituent that firmly believes children should be protected, no matter their ethnic background or where they live. Equality under the law, with protections against abuse, is a value I would hope you share as my elected member of Congress. No child should be taken from their bed in the middle of the night, blindfolded, hand tied, and transported to a detention cell without their parents or a lawyer present. No child should be forced to sign a confession in a language they do not understand. No child should be tried in a military court with a 99% conviction rate, or detained in facilities that family members cannot reach. Palestinian children have the right to a safe and just future, like all children in communities around the world. Will you reconsider cosponsoring legislation like H.R. 2407 that ensures no U.S. taxpayer funds are used by any country, including Israel, to abuse and detain children?”

“Since 2000, more than 10,000 Palestinian children in the occupied West Bank have been detained by Israeli forces and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system that denies them basic rights. In the occupied West Bank, two separate legal systems operate in the same territory. The sole factor in determining which laws apply to a person is their nationality and ethnicity. Israeli military law, which denies people their fundamental rights, is applied to the entire Palestinian population—while Israeli settlers living in the West Bank are subject to the Israeli civilian and criminal legal system. Do you think Americans should continue to provide $3.8 billion a year to a government that denies the safety and well being of children?”

“I believe my member of Congress should ensure justice, equality, and human rights for all. Why do you think it is okay to provide unconditioned U.S. military funding to Israel when Israeli forces abuse Palestinian children in a military detention system where ill-treatment is widespread and institutionalized?”