



THE FLPA

Every Congressional office has a number of legislative staffers that cover a range of issues, from education to immigration to health care.

The one we care about is the Foreign Policy Legislative Assistant (FPLA). This person has a big responsibility – s/he handles all possible issues related to foreign policy for the Senator/Representative – in other words, a lot of information. As such, it's possible, even likely, that FPLAs may not know very much about or pay a lot of attention to Darfur and anti-genocide legislation.

This means a few things for you:

- **Make your “asks” as easy as possible for them.** The FPLA is a busy person. For example, if you can bring a copy of the bill to your meeting, rather than making them look it up online, it saves them time and makes them more responsive to you in the future.
- All legislative staffers deal with a lot of constituents on a day-to-day basis. Many of these people are not well-informed about their issue or may not hold members of Congress accountable for what they're asking for. **You need to distinguish yourself – by demonstrating that you know what you're asking for, you have a legitimate presence in the community, and you are a reliable and trustworthy source of information.**
- Thousands of pieces of legislation are introduced in Congress every legislative session. **If a Senator or Representative is not currently co-sponsoring a piece of legislation, it's probably not because they don't support it – they may just not know about it.** By bringing it to their attention and showing that this legislation is important to their constituents, you are helping them set their anti-genocide agenda.
- **It is your job to make sure that, among all the issues the FPLA has to deal with, Darfur and anti-genocide legislation is a high priority.** You do that by building and maintaining a strong relationship with the FPLA.



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Building a Relationship

We want members of Congress to support our legislation now and in the future. If their FPLAs know that there is an active constituency in their district/state that is keeping an eye on their bosses' actions for anti-genocide legislation, they are more likely to do so.

Polite persistence is the key to keeping Darfur high on your FPLA's agenda. If there's an article about Darfur in your local paper, send it to them. If a piece of legislation that they've co-sponsored passes in committee, give them a call and let them know about it. If you do an event, invite them to attend. If they can't, at least send them photos afterwards.

Always follow up. The most important part of a lobby meeting is not the lobby meeting itself – **it's the phone call you make afterwards**, once the FPLA has had a chance to get the member of Congress's stance on the legislation. Whether it's a lobby meeting or a call-in day or a letter-writing campaign, the FPLA needs to know that this is not a random communication from someone who isn't paying a lot of attention – it's a communication from a concerned, active group of constituents who know their stuff and want to ensure the Senator/Representative's sustained support for anti-genocide legislation!

But establishing a relationship with a Congressional office doesn't only mean pushing them to take action – it also means **thanking them when they do respond and do what you're asking for**. When they vote for a bill, thank them! Make sure you inform all of your contacts so they can send thank-you letters or make thank-you phone calls. Send a letter to the letter of your local paper commending the Senator/Representative for his/her vote in favor of the legislation. This shows your FPLA that you care enough about this issue to walk the walk, and it's going to make them more likely to listen to you and become active advocates for anti-genocide legislation in the future.

