HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS DURING AND AFTER A DISASTER

Welcome! The purpose of this toolkit is to give you the information you need to talk to your elected officials and other important government officials about making sure that survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual violence are safe during and following a major disaster like a hurricane.

**What?** Call or visit your elected officials to talk to them about this important issue! Urge them to start talking to emergency management agencies. And if the politicians are federal, urge them to draft legislation to appropriate funding for FEMA to help facilitate training for everyone at the state level and training for shelter workers, who are usually volunteers.

**Where?** Your federal elected officials all have local field offices in their home states or districts. *Go visit the office!* They exist to hear from constituents like you. Bring a copy of the ABA’s letter to FEMA with you, and if you want, bring Resolution 107A and its accompanying report with you. You can drop the materials off with the staffer at the field office. *Call* – your elected officials’ job is to listen to you. And they track what people are calling about. *Email* your elected officials! Most have some way to get in contact with them via email. That’s a really easy, quick way to contact your elected officials.

**Why?** Imagine that a woman has separated from her abuser, but a hurricane strikes and she has to evacuate herself and her children to the nearest shelter. At the shelter, she sees her abuser, and if he finds out where she lives, it could be a lethal situation. What will she do? What will the shelter do to deal with this situation as a storm is raging outside?

Imagine that a woman is in an abusive relationship, but she, her abuser, and her children all have to evacuate together to the shelter. In the shelter, her abuser begins hitting her and verbally abusing her. What can be done to help her? Will the shelter workers know what to do?

The ABA House of Delegates passed Resolution 107A during the Annual Meeting in 2018, which was originally introduced by the ABA YLD Public Service Team. The resolution was designed to deal with the scenarios outlined above, and calls for emergency management agencies, DV shelters, the American Red Cross, and other important stakeholders to work together to plan for individuals who are coming into shelters who are dealing with ongoing intimate partner violence, have been evacuated to the same shelter as their abuser, or if intimate partner violence or sexual violence actually occurs inside the shelter. If you’re from a disaster prone state, or if you’re concerned with making sure that everyone is safe during a disaster, you should get involved!
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4. New York Times article highlighting this issue and that it’s a problem (separate PDF attachment)
LOBBYING 101

1. Find your elected representative’s contact information!
   a. Don’t know who your elected representatives are? No problem! Put your state and zip code into the following websites to find your elected representative:
      i. U.S. Senate (this website also has specific contact info):
         1. https://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm
      ii. U.S. House of Representatives:
         1. https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative
   b. When you know who your elected representative is, use this website to find their phone number and other contact information:
      i. https://www.house.gov/representatives

2. Calling your elected representative in Washington:
   a. The easiest thing is to call their offices directly. You can also call the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121, which can route your call to the specific elected representative you want to call.
   b. What happens once I call?
      i. A legislative assistant will answer the phone. They’ll ask if you need a response, and it’s better if you say you don’t. That way they can tally you down without having to go through the extra step of adding you to a response database.
      ii. The most important part is to be clear about what issue you’re calling about. Why you support or oppose certain legislation is irrelevant. The more people that call the representative’s office, the less detail the assistants will write down. Getting straight to the point makes things easier for everyone — including those who are waiting for their phone calls to be picked up.

3. You can also call your district office as well. The above websites will direct you to the elected representative’s website, which will have contact information for local district offices.

4. Here’s a suggested script for calling your federal elected representative:
   a. “Hi, I’m [YOUR NAME], and I’m a member of the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division. I’m calling to urge [ELECTED OFFICIAL’S NAME] to increase funding to FEMA so that the agency can plan for intimate partner violence and sexual violence during a disaster like a hurricane. This is a public safety issue, because victims are unsafe during a disaster inside a shelter when there hasn’t been planning for how to deal with these unique issues. Thanks for your time!”

5. Meet with your elected representative, whether in DC or in a district office
a. Every elected representative’s website has contact information for the district offices. You can use that to see if you can arrange a meeting with someone there.
b. You can also request a meeting with the elected representative through their website.
c. If you do set up a meeting, keep in mind the following:
   i. **Getting started.** Please be on time for each meeting as the member of Congress and their staff may have only 10 or 15 minutes to speak with you. Most meetings will be with staff and not the member. If you are meeting with staff and you were expecting the member, do not be disappointed. The member may be voting in committee or on the floor.
   ii. **Be prepared.** You and everyone in your group should know what the goal of the meeting is and what role each person is playing in the meeting. Your message should be brief. Identify questions you want to ask and those that may be asked of you.
   iii. **Identify everyone in the room.** It is important for the Senator/Representative or staff to know exactly who you are and where you are from. Be sure to clearly identify who are constituents.
   iv. **Make a clear request.** State in a clear and direct manner what position you want the member to take on the legislation. Be direct and polite with your request. **If you do not know the answer to a question, acknowledge it and offer to get back to the member later with the answer.**

1. **Here’s a suggested script for a meeting:**
   a. “I wanted to visit today to urge [ELECTED OFFICIAL’S NAME] to do something to make sure that we’re planning for intimate partner violence and sexual violence during a disaster. Often, victims have to evacuate to the same shelter as their abuser, or victims who are in an ongoing abusive relationship have to evacuate with their abuser, and shelters need to know how to handle these situations. This is a New York Times article that describes the problem, so if you want, I can leave this with you. This is also a copy of a letter the ABA sent to FEMA urging it to look into this issue, so I can also leave this with you if that would be helpful. Finally, the ABA passed a resolution about this topic. Do you want a copy of that resolution and report?”
   b. If the person has additional questions for you or you want to say anything else, feel free.
   c. You can leave a copy of the FEMA letter and the New York Times article at the office, or even Resolution 107A if you want. The letter is a great summary of the resolution
though, and it shows that we’ve already communicated with FEMA about this.

v. **Stick to your agenda.** Members of Congress are good at getting advocates to engage in every topic except the one at hand. Forcefully, but politely, steer the conversation back to the main issues.

vi. **Anticipate the arguments of your opponents.** It is best to address your opponents’ arguments early. Do so directly and openly, without a hint of defensiveness. Remember, you are right.

vii. **Be pleasant.** You can be a passionate advocate for your position without arguing or belittling. Some people are never going to agree with you. Just because a member does not agree with you on one issue does not mean that you cannot find common ground on another. Stick to your points and then thank them for listening.

viii. **Pay attention to staff.** The surest way to jeopardize the meeting is by being rude to staff. Make sure you get the name of the staff person responsible for civil justice issues before you leave. They can help explain your position with the member. The staff is likely to know more about the issues and can usually spend more time with you than the member. Take advantage of this time by elaborating your position.

ix. **Don’t talk about money.** Do not talk about how much financial support you have provided to the member or other inappropriate topics that violate federal election or ethics rules. Do not ask about employment opportunities for your children or other unrelated business. If you are asked to provide financial support to a member of Congress, please ask him or her to follow up with you later and return to your lobby topic.

x. **Follow up and follow through.** Express your desire to establish an ongoing relationship with the member in your meeting. Send an email thank you note to everyone you meet with and be sure to note any commitment that he or she made. Feel free to also follow up with additional materials. It is equally important for you to follow up on the commitments you made during the meeting. If you promised them a case example or additional information, make sure you respond within a reasonable time frame.

6. You can also email your elected representative – every person has an option to utilize email on their website.

7. You should also consider calling your state elected representative!
   a. Here’s a suggested script for calling your state elected representative:
      i. “Hi, I’m [YOUR NAME], and I’m a member of the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division. I’m calling to urge [ELECTED OFFICIAL’S NAME] to contact the legislative committee on emergency management and our emergency management agency to ask them how
we’re planning for intimate partner violence and sexual violence during a disaster. This is a public safety issue, because victims are unsafe during a disaster inside a shelter when there hasn’t been planning for how to deal with these unique issues. Thanks for your time!”