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Did you know that petitions are actually a fundamental part of our constitutional republic?

At the ACLJ, our petitions literally put one of our most important (but underutilized) constitutional rights into action: “the right of the people . . . to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”¹

Many people in recent years have rightfully noted the danger in “slacktivism” or “hashtag activism”² campaigns where people click links to express their support for important causes merely to alleviate their guilt for failing to show true dedication and bring about lasting change. The difference between an effective petition and ineffective petition is often found in the way the petitions are used. At the ACLJ, petitions are an important part of engaging with citizens to bring the ACLJ’s organizational resources to bear on the issues of our day. We actually use petitions in Congress, with government officials, and in courts to accomplish results. Looking at the ACLJ website, you’ll notice numerous petitions each containing hundreds of thousands of signatures. Questions by our fellow citizens are often raised: What do we do with these petitions? Are these petitions actually effective? What is the significance of these petitions?

In short, these petitions are incredibly effective tools and are an essential part of the ACLJ’s legal advocacy. Each petition creates an avenue for real-world change. Here’s how:

1. Engaging Members of Congress and Government Officials

First, we can directly and immediately alert individual Members of Congress and other government officials of the size and scope of the public support for our initiatives. Unlike, say, White House petitions – which at best generate a response from low-level staffers – our most successful petitions have generated direct White House, State Department, and congressional responses at the highest level.

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¹ U.S. CONST. AMEND. I.

² Laura Seah, *Does Slacktivism Work?*, WASH. POST (Mar. 12, 2014), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/03/12/does-slacktivism-work/?utm_term=.c9cb4a644cc5.

For example, our petition to get the White House and State Department to directly engage on behalf of a previously-unknown American pastor imprisoned in Turkey not only helped generate statements and calls for the pastor's release from the highest levels of the White House and State Department, it also generated a direct conversation with Turkey's President advocating on behalf of the imprisoned pastor³.

2. Harnessing the Power of the Media

ACLJ petitions are helpful in addressing the media and bringing important, yet not yet widely known issues to the forefront. For instance, the ACLJ's activity and successful petition drive was one of the factors that helped bring Pastor Youcef and other imprisoned Christian pastors in Iran and Sudan to the attention of the media.⁴ These stories generated significant media attention. As a result of the petition drive, ACLJ's advocacy, and vocal pressure from concerned citizens, the Secretary of State, the White House and many members of Congress joined in the call to release these imprisoned pastors.⁵ Similarly, an ACLJ petition campaign with over 220,000 signatures challenged a U.S. deal that would have sent funding and armaments to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood leadership. This story and petition was picked up by the media and helped lead to a change of policy.⁶ Of course, it would have been difficult for this to happen were the situations not to have been brought to light through the petitions in the first place.

Not only that, but petition drives can help correct false narratives that might otherwise carry the storyline. For instance, despite efforts from the Left to portray now-Justice Gorsuch as an extremist, hundreds of thousands of people joined ACLJ petitions to express their support for the immensely qualified judge who has now been confirmed to the Supreme Court.

3. Comfort to Persecuted Christians Abroad

The ACLJ has launched massive petition drives and social media campaigns on behalf of two persecuted pastors – Pastor Christian Hassan Abduraheem⁷, a Christian pastor in Sudan who was sentenced to 12 years in prison for his Christian faith . . .

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³ Jay Sekulow, *President Trump, Vice President Pence Raise Pastor Brunson's Case Three Times with Turkey's President*, ACLJ (May 17, 2017), <https://aclj.org/persecuted-church/president-trump-vice-president-pence-raise-pastor-brunsons-case-three-times-with-turkeys-president>.

⁴ See, e.g., Stoyan Zaimov, *Pastor Saeed Abedini Given 'Glimmer of Hope' for Clemency; ACLJ Launches New Petition*, CHRISTIAN POST (Jan. 27, 2014), <http://www.christianpost.com/news/pastor-saeed-abedini-given-glimmer-of-hope-for-clemency-aclj-launches-new-petition-113441/>; Catherine E. Schoichet & Eric Marrapodi, *Iran Deal Doesn't Mention Detained American Pastor Saeed Abedini*, CNN (Nov. 26, 2013), <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/25/world/meast/iran-american-pastor-saeed-abedini/index.html>.

⁵ Jay Sekulow, et al., *Pastor Youcef Nardarkhani's Story*, ACLJ (Apr. 12, 2012), <https://aclj.org/iran/pastor-youcef-nardarkhanis-story>; Be Heard Project, *Youcef Nardarkhani*, <https://beheardproject.com/youcef> (last visited June 8, 2017).

⁶ David French, *Why You Should Sign ACLJ Petitions*, ACLJ (Feb. 6, 2013), <https://aclj.org/us-constitution/why-you-should-sign-aclj-petitions>.

⁷ ACLJ authors, *Major Victory: Christian Hassan Abduraheem Freed from Prison in Sudan*, ACLJ (June 10, 2017), <https://aclj.org/persecuted-church/major-victory-christian-hassan-abduraheem-freed-from-prison-in-sudan>.

. . . and Pastor Andrew Brunson⁸, an American citizen preaching Christianity in Turkey, who has been imprisoned for more than eight months because of his Christian faith. Your voice helped free Pastor Abduraheem and your continued support comforts Pastor Brunson as we continue to campaign for his release. In addition, we have had constant communications with President Trump and Vice President Pence on Pastor Brunson's imprisonment and the Trump Administration has directly raised the pastor's plight with President Erdogan of Turkey.

4. "Committees" in Briefs to the Supreme Court

On occasion we ask you to join "committees" instead of petitions. These committees are represented in briefs to the Supreme Court and to federal courts at all levels. Collectively, hundreds of thousands of Americans have weighed in on Trump's Executive Orders to keep America safe from terrorism, and on many other cases dealing with vital issues of constitutional law.

Finally, by signing a petition, you become part of the ACLJ community and will be kept updated on our cases, our public advocacy, and can respond immediately to future petition requests. By signing petitions immediately, we can build pressure faster and get government officials engaged sooner.

Petitions serve to connect people who are dedicated to protecting crucial freedoms. Joining in one common endeavor makes it easier to organize and unite for the next challenge. Even when petitions do not reach their desired result immediately, the ACLJ petitions you sign have at least fulfilled the purpose of exposing the wrong and injustice and may even win over more support from others for the next battle.

Your voice matters.

⁸ Sekulow *supra* note 2.