



Help Reform Copyright Law - Visit Your Congressperson!

Take a few minutes when you're in Washington - or in your own area – and do some good. Visit your congressperson's office!

The Historical Recording Coalition for Access and Preservation has been working to obtain changes in copyright law to make it easier to *preserve* historical recordings and *make them accessible* to the public. Both are very difficult under restrictive U.S. laws.

It's an uphill struggle for a small organization like ours to get noticed. We have a strong case, but people in power are hard to reach. However one thing we have learned is that nothing gets a congressperson's attention faster than hearing from one of his or her own constituents. Constituents vote and they influence others, and *that* really counts to a politician.

A visit is easy to arrange (believe us—we've tried it). Visiting your U.S. Representative may be especially productive, since most copyright legislation originates in the House. The House and Senate Office Buildings are just a few blocks from major Washington hotels, and representatives have offices in their home districts as well. Here are some tips on how to arrange a visit. We hope you'll take a few minutes to do this. It can be both helpful and interesting.

How to Arrange a Meeting

1. Go to www.house.gov and type in your zip code. When your representative's name pops up click on it and you'll be taken to their website. (You may need your nine-digit zip code; if you don't know what it is go to www.usps.com and click on "find a zip code").
2. On the representative's website you'll find the phone and fax number and address of their offices. There's also a place to e-mail the representative, but don't be fooled. They get a flood of e-mails and you'll make very little, if any, impression that way.
3. Call the number and ask for the name of the legislative assistant who handles "copyright and intellectual property" matters. This is an important piece of information and is almost never on the website. Thank them and say goodbye.
4. Call back a day or two later, tell them you're from their district, you'd like to visit the office and speak to them about a copyright issue. Ask to meet with the representative him/herself or, if they're not available, with the legislative assistant whose name you got earlier. Note: it may be difficult to see the representative, however the legislative assistant is his expert on matters like copyright and is very influential. Without that name the intern who answers the phone will probably try to shunt you to a low level staffer. So the priority is to meet with (a) the representative, (b) the legislative assistant for copyright, or (c) any other staffer.
5. Be on time and be flexible. Congressional offices are busy places and there may be delays or interruptions, but they do care about you. Always be polite. Bring some materials to leave behind (such as the HRCAP recommendations sheet). Tell them why you care about this issue, and that it affects many of their constituents. Ask for their commitment to look into the issue. Ask for a business card.
6. Let us know how it turned out!

Ranking the Most Effective Ways to Contact a Congressperson:

1. Visit their office – most effective by far!
2. Letter faxed to office, followed by a phone call.
3. Phone call (only) to office.
4. Letter mailed to office (because of security concerns mail can be much delayed).
5. Obvious form letter or fax.
6. E-mail – least effective.

Meeting Tips

1. Nearly all copyright legislation originates in the House, so start with your U.S. Representative.
2. You don't have to be an expert on copyright. You're just there to raise the issue. You can hand them the sheet outlining our essential points, and also mention the coalition website, www.recordingcopyright.org. Tell them you support these recommendations and hope your representative will also.
3. They may ask if there are any specific bills you think the representative should vote for. If you know about a bill that is before the House tell them about it. If not, tell them that right now you just want them to know about this issue.
4. Members of the Judiciary Committee, especially its chairman, John Conyers (D-MI), have enormous influence over copyright legislation. Chances are your representative is not on that committee, but they still have a vote on all legislation. If they're sufficiently motivated they might even mention to Conyers or to a member of Judiciary that they've heard from constituents about historical recordings and copyright. That would be a home run—congressmen listen to each other.
5. It doesn't matter who you voted for. He or she is *your* representative.
6. Don't worry that there's only one or two of you visiting. You can mention that eight organizations totaling more than 70,000 members have endorsed some or all of these proposals. Also, since they probably have never heard about this issue before (certainly not from the record industry!), it will get their attention.
7. Bonus: If you're in Washington and you'd like a free tour of the Capitol building your representative's office will be happy to arrange one. Tours of the White House can also be arranged, but those must be requested one to six months in advance. Tours of the Senate are arranged by your senator's office.

More information and tips on contacting a congressperson:

http://www.congresslink.org/print_basics_tipsforcontacting.htm - tips

<http://w2.eff.org/congress> - tips

<http://www.contactingthecongress.org/> - excellent site, sometimes has staff names