

Advocacy

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Simple Steps
to
Effect Change
in
The Lives
of
Children and Families

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*Another way to
show parents
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Advocacy:

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What can I do if I fit in the restricted category?

You can **STILL** advocate-- just follow these simple rules:

1. Be sure you are not conducting advocacy activities when you are working or on-call.
2. Be sure you are not using any means of work communication technology such as computers, e-mail, phones or stationary.
3. Do not represent your views as your program or work.

Who Should Advocate:

- Parents
- Family Members
- Friends
- Children: teach the importance of advocacy young
- Staff Members
- Board of Directors
- Policy Councils
- Elder and Tribal Groups
- Community Members

A Successful Advocate is:

Respectful:

- Communicate your message in a respectful manner. Raised voices and rude words or tone alienate people.
- Mannerisms: Be on time for meetings, refrain from interrupting, keep on point of the message, and follow up with a thank you statement or note.
- Be brief: Most decision makers have very limited time to understand your position or concern and appreciate getting right to the point.

Influential:

- The power to affect other people's thinking by means of position or action.
- Getting other people to participate.
- Ensure your communication and actions further your influence.
- Always be truthful.

Good:

Inviting legislators to visit your program or organization

Better:

Provide information about your program and advocacy issues before the visit

Why:

Helps legislators feel more prepared to speak on behalf of your issue and learn about your program.

Good:

Assume the elected official is somewhat aware of the community needs

Better:

Do not assume they completely understand your specific organizational mission, issues or outcomes.

Why: They may hold a public office but they won't know everything.

Strategies Good and Better:

Good:

Mailing a form letter requesting support

Better:

Mailing a **hand written** letter

Why:

Gets priority reading; someone taking the time to handwrite a letter tells the decision maker the issue is important.

Good:

Providing education testimony on an issue

Better:

Include and site credible resources used in testimony

Why:

Builds credibility

Good:

Contacting all legislative representatives and senators

Better:

Specifically targeting your representatives and senators

Why:

Some politicians prioritize listening to their constituency

Good:

Written letter to the editor

Better:

Groups of individually written letters concerning the same message.

Why:

More letters on the same subject draw attention to the subject matter making them more likely to be published.

Advocacy Steps:

Get Informed:

- Attend program advocacy meetings
- Attend FAEYC/AAEYC/SEAEYC meetings
- Attend Leadership Conferences such as AHSA
- Attend a candidates forum in your community
- Check out the web resources on voting and current issues

www.votesmart.org

www.akheadstart.org

(Alaska Head Start Association)

www.akaeyc.org/htm/policy.php

(Alaska AEYC Policy Updates)

www.naeyc.org/policy/

(National Association for the Education of Young Children)

<http://w3.legis.state.ak.us/>

(Alaska State Legislature home page)

www.democrats.org

www.rnc.org (Republican National Committee)

Take Action:

1. Get informed
2. Know your legislators and his/her aide
3. Articulate your message
4. Partner with likeminded individuals and/or groups
5. Contact legislators: write, call, testify, meet
6. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or blog
7. Invite the press and legislators to your program
8. Help others get involved

Know your Legislators and Aids:

Call your local legislative Information office (LIO). They can tell you:

- Your district
- Your senator and aide
- Your representative and aide
- Contact information

At the LIO you can:

- Send a Public Opinion Message (POM)
- Testify at a committee hearing
- Meet with legislators
- Get more information

Articulate your message:

1. After getting informed about an issue, develop your position.
2. Write out two or three sentences that summarizes your position.
3. Prepare to articulate your position through a variety of communication styles that fit you best.

- Invitations to testify for standing house and senate committees such as: Education, Finance, Health and Social Services and Labor and Commerce Committees.
- Each person or group will have just a few minutes to convey their concern or share information during their testimony. Often 2-3 minutes is the norm.
- Prepare for your testimony by writing out your thoughts. Reading from notes can be helpful. For some, speaking from their heart is an easier way to testify.

Sample language:

When writing a letter or testifying consider including the following:

- Who you are
- Where you are from (community, program)
- Why this issue is important to you
- How this issue affects you and your community
- Suggestions that can help alleviate the issue
- How you can be reached
- A thank you for their time/attention
- Ask for their support

- Answer questions. If you don't have answers, say so, then respond as quickly as possible after the meeting.
- Ask for support. Don't forget this critical step, some people do.
- Ask if the lawmaker would like any follow-up from you

After the meeting:

- Send a thank-you letter that briefly recaps the main points of your issue and remind the lawmaker of any commitment that was made
- Communicate the results of the meeting to your board, partners and supporters
- Follow the course of your issue through the legislative process
- Decide if and when it's appropriate to contact the lawmaker again.

Section Source: The Foraker Group

Testify:

Testimony has similar benefits as meeting elected officials. Often the process is different. Local papers print schedules for testimony for the following week each Sunday during the legislative session (Jan-Apr).

Opportunities to testify:

- At your local legislative Information Office (LIO). Meeting directly with elected officials or through teleconferencing technology are two ways the LIO connects the constituents with legislators.

Partner with Likeminded individuals or groups:

1. Join existing groups that are passionate about your concern or position. Often groups can get attention where disjointed individuals cannot.
2. Pool resources in an attempt to get the message further.
3. Learn what has been happening to be prepared for next steps and the best way to communicate the message. Use of common language and goals help eliminate confusion.
4. Recruit others...

Contact Legislators:

Phone Calls: Phone calls (toll free) on an issue or legislation have some effect, but it's hard to make all your points in a call. A telephone "campaign" not only makes little impact, it irritates staff and ties up phone lines- not a very effective way to persuade a lawmaker. If you do choose to communicate by phone, these steps provide you the best chance of having your voice heard:

- Identify yourself, your organization, where you live and give your phone number
- Briefly state your issue or the piece of legislation you support or oppose
- Ask for a specific action from the legislator
- Offer to supply more information via mail or e-mail
- Give a time you would be available for a return call
- Say thanks

Letters or E-mails:

Generally, correspondence is reviewed and tallied by staff, with a summary going to the legislator. Your letter has the best chance of getting directly to the legislator if:

- It's from someone he or she knows personally
- It's from someone prominent
- It's from someone who lives in the lawmaker's district
- It's concise and polite-- with no veiled threats or accusations.
- It's clear about the issues and the action needed from the legislator.

Important Points:

1. Always be honest and respectful in your communications-- don't stretch the truth, misconstrue the comments of the person to whom you're writing, or those of other elected officials.
2. If you made a campaign contribution to an elected official, **NEVER** mention this in any call, letter, meeting or other encounter.

Successful Meetings with Elected Officials:

A personal meeting with an elected official provides your organization with an excellent opportunity to promote your issues, speak for your constituency and ask for support. Below are a few basic rules to help you get the most out of your meeting:

Before the meeting:

- Be clear about what you want to accomplish
- Prepare background material: simple, concise and to the point
- Decide who can best speak on your issues. Several people can attend, but don't overwhelm the meeting with too many people.
- Decide if it's appropriate to bring someone who benefits from your services
- Set the meeting, letting the scheduler know who you are, your organizational affiliation, how many people will attend the issue and wish to discuss
- Hold a pre-meeting with your group to outline the points you want to make, who will make them, and review your messages. This is an important step that's often forgotten
- Arrive early

At the meeting:

- Spend a few minutes briefly telling the lawmaker about your organization and its mission
- Present the issue, making succinct points about why it's important and what effect it has on your community.
- Listen to the concerns of the lawmaker