

Ten Tips for Advocacy

1. *Get to know your legislators.* Identify who represents you at the national and state level and become familiar with their concerns and priorities, including their expertise, interest, and views. Also, familiarize yourself with legislators' districts and constituencies, voting records, and schedules for being in the capitol and being home in their district. Contact legislators before you have an issue that you want addressed.
2. *Learn the legislative process.* Understand how ideas work their way through the process to become laws or programs. Stay abreast of events and issues in your community and legislature. Know leadership and Governor session priorities and budget projections.
3. *Identify fellow advocates and partners.* Forming a coalition with those that have common objectives arms you with more power and potentially more influence. Strengthen relationships with allies.
4. *Be open to negotiation.* Do not dismiss potential allies because of past disagreements or a history of opposition. You never know who may turn out to support your issue.
5. *Be honest, straightforward and realistic.* These are musts for any successful relationship. Never stretch the truth or make promises that you can't keep.
6. *Timing is everything.* The earlier in the legislative process that you involve yourself, the more likely you will be able to influence the process.
7. *Be sure to follow up with legislators and their staff.* Provide requested follow-up information in a timely fashion to your legislators, letting them know that you are a reliable resource.
8. *Recognize the sensitivity of issues that involve government and family.* The same policy that some people believe will strengthen families may often be seen by others as intrusive.
9. *Always say thanks.* Policymakers get hundreds of letters of criticism for every letter of appreciation they receive. Write letters thanking them when they support goals and policies you have recommended. Additionally, write letters to the editors in their community newspapers thanking the legislator by name for their leadership and support. They will remember those letters and who wrote them.
10. *Have staying power and be persistent.* Don't give up! Don't let one defeat discourage you. Changes don't happen overnight, but if you stay committed, you will succeed.

Advocacy Strategies

- **Day of Action Events** – Twitter storms, Facebook forums, organize a rally, or host a house party; attract attention to an issue to gain earned media.
- **District Office Visits** – meet with a locally-based staffer to discuss issues of concern and legislative priorities, promote and encourage positive change. Remember to provide a one page leave-behind and other briefing materials.
- **Capitol Lobby Days** – organize a capitol advocacy day. Everyone wear blue and bring pinwheels – this gives members something to ask you about, be a presence. Let legislators know that our work is not done.
- **Online Petitions** – millions of people and organizations are using online petition tools to change laws, influence corporate behavior, and make their communities healthier, safer, and more equitable.
- **Letters to the Editor** – writing for the press is a great strategy that is often overlooked as a way to get your message in the media and to reach a larger audience.
- **Press Events/News Conference** – around significant developments like the creation or launch of a new program, creation of a coalition, or major news item. Involve the media in investigating implementation and enforcement or call on an agency to assess a particular rule if inappropriate or harmful to the safety and well-being of children.
- **Host Informational Briefings** - at the state capitol, a partner organization or corporate sponsor’s office. Educate local, state, or federal officials on issues important to children and their families.
- **Initiate Letter-Writing Campaigns** - to help ensure legislators hear your voice. Encourage members to create a children’s agenda. Let them know that a broad constituency is concerned about the health and safety of children and the support of families.
- **Annual Pre-Session Meetings** – Relationship-building through face-to-face meetings is essential to the ongoing process of educating and emotionally engaging state legislators. Meeting once or twice per year can pay off in the attention legislators give to your calls on specific bills during the session.
- **News Releases** - issues a short reaction to a specific news item, the “official stance” of the organization on a specific event. Get coverage on something that the media may have missed.

Making Your Engagement Count in the Legislative Process

How to Get the Results You Want

- Once a relevant bill has been introduced, contact members of the committee, their legislative aide or the appropriate budget analyst to make them aware of your position. Communication can be through calls, mail, email, or personal visits.
- Contact your legislators and request that they co-sponsor the bill. The more co-sponsors a bill has the more likely it is to gain support and move through the legislative process.
- Develop an “action alert” for your members and partners indicating how they can get involved in supporting or opposing the legislation. Include directions to contact legislators and the position of the organization.
- Be prepared to provide alternative language for the legislation and ideas for strengthening the bill.
- Indicate under which circumstances you support or oppose the bill. Be clear as to how you would like the legislature to vote.
- Provide testimony (written or oral) before the committee or subcommittee as an advocate for children and families, and child abuse prevention. Be brief; be concise; be clear. One page handouts help ensure the information is read.

Being Active Outside of the Legislative Session

- Schedule meetings with legislators in their communities. Utilize your network to identify people who know legislators. These individuals can set up and participate in meetings and be your “in” to establishing a relationship. Meetings with legislators should be informative. Taking the time to meet with your legislators before you need their assistance puts you in a better position to ask for assistance down the road. You should provide information about your organization’s mission and goals. Let them know that you are available as a resource.
- Invite legislators to attend a program site, like Healthy Families America or another prevention program. This provides an opportunity for policymakers to see first-hand how their decisions directly impact individuals. There is no better way to advocate for our programs!
- Invite legislators to your meetings and events. Add legislators’ names to your mailing list to ensure that they receive invitations to open houses and conferences. Also include them on your newsletter or other publication mailing lists. This is a great way to keep policymakers updated on what kinds of things are going on with your organization, what needs are being met, and obstacles with which you are faced.
- Invite legislators to speak at meetings, open houses and conferences. You can also ask legislators to write an article for your newsletter or other publication. These kinds of invitations force legislators to think about the issues.
- Consider honoring those legislators who have supported child and family policies with an award or by highlighting them in your newsletter. This gives your “champions” recognition and support, and shows appreciation for their work to help children and families.
- Send thank-you letters. Write thank-you letters to legislators when they are not in session thanking them for their work in the previous session. This keeps you in touch with legislators without always asking for something from them.

Understanding Your State's Legislative System

The legislative process varies somewhat by states, but generally follows the same basic steps as the federal legislative process. The state House of Representatives, Senate and Governor act in a similar capacity as the U.S. House of Representatives, Senate and President. It is important to understand your state and local legislative processes and to be advocates at the state and local levels of government. To find out more about your state legislature, contact your local or state chapter of the *League of Women Voters* or visit the *National Conference of State Legislatures* at:

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