Public Policy Advocacy: Meeting with Elected Officials

© Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
35 Halsey Street
Newark, NJ 07042
973-642-8100
www.spannj.org
Empowered Parents: Educated, Engaged, Effective!
Public Policy Advocacy for Social Change

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead
What is Advocacy?

• Speaking, writing, or acting in support of a cause
• Using a variety of organized tactics to achieve a public policy goal
• Demanding a change to benefit the lives of many
How Change Happens

“Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has and it never will.”

-Frederick Douglas
Why do people get involved?

- They believe the issue is important to them and their family
- They believe they have something to contribute
- They believe that they will be listened to and their contributions respected
- They believe that their participation will make a difference
Opportunities to Participate in Legislative Advocacy

- Tell story verbally to an advocate & give permission to share
- Tell story verbally within a small group (focus group)
- Tell story verbally to policymakers (at public hearing, meeting with legislator, etc.)
Remember:

- Empowering families to participate in advocacy for their children, their community, the larger society, is its own victory, regardless of the specific outcome of any particular effort.

- *Democracy is not a spectator sport!*
Reaching Policymakers

• Call * Write * Visit
  – Brief and to the point
  – Stick to one subject
  – Identify yourself
  – How will you and others be affected?
  – Be clear about what you want
  – Be accurate & specific
  – Be polite & positive
  – Offer your help
  – Follow up!
Calling a Legislative office

- Jot down speaking points in advance; if asking for a meeting, know who will be coming with you
- Ask to speak to the legislator or relevant aide
- Note your legislative district
- Give bill # & name or topic
Calling a Legislative office

- Explain why the issue is important to you & the families you serve
- Ask for a meeting
- If not possible, ask for the legislator’s support
- Write notes on your conversation
- Follow up! (In writing!)
Preparing for Legislative Visits

- Decide who you will visit. Read up on them.
- Establish agenda & goals; prepare content & delivery tailored to the legislator.
- Collect stories from those who can’t attend.
- Contact the legislative office nearest you for an appointment.
Scheduling a Meeting

• During Recess call the District office of the Member. You can find information at www.House.gov or www.Senate.gov

• Ask to schedule a meeting with the member
Scheduling a Meeting

• Be sure to inform the scheduler who will be attending the meeting. Members love to meet with kids!

• If the Member is booked, ask to speak with the health legislative assistant/aide
Scheduling a Meeting

• Remember, you can also schedule meetings with the Member and his/her staff even when they are in session.

• You can schedule a meeting with the Member on weekends or with their DC staff via conference call.
Preparing for Legislative Visits

- Plan your visit.
- Determine group composition. Pull together your small team of key allies. Bring kids if possible.
- If possible, include someone who has visited a legislator before.
- Practice helps: if you have time, role play beforehand.
Preparing for Legislative Visits

• Be prepared, but don’t feel that everyone has to be an expert! You are there to tell your story and the story of other families; those experiences are powerful!
Meeting with Elected Officials

- Speak up
- Emphasize key points
- Establish eye contact
- Use visual aids
- Be brief
- Don’t be afraid
- Don’t lie if you don’t know. Offer to find out.
- Be yourself
During the Legislative Visit

• Don’t get intimidated or frustrated.
• Be on time, and don’t stay too long.
• Build a relationship.
• Follow up!
The Bottom Line

• Remember, it’s all about relationships!
• So, win or lose, keep in touch with those elected officials, administrators, and other policy-makers. Let them know you are still around!