

# Legislative Advocacy

**ADVOCATE: - n.**

**One who supports or defends a cause, or one who pleads on another's behalf.**

## **Tips for Effective Advocacy**

- Be ready to work hard
- Know who cares about the issue (both pro and con)
- Know what you want and ask for it
- Anticipate and deal with concerns
- Never burn your bridges
- Build and preserve your credibility
- Target your efforts
- Follow-up
- Praise and thank your supporters
- Don't give up

## **What is Advocacy?**

There are many ways to bring about positive change for children and families, one of the most effective ways is legislative advocacy. Quite simply, this means supporting laws and policies that are good for children, and opposing those that are not. Advocacy is sometimes distinguished from lobbying in that it is typically less politically driven. As an advocate, you can have a lasting effect on policy by using your voice.

Some of the actions a child advocate can take to influence legislation are:

- Writing a letter/email
- Making phone calls
- Visiting with legislators
- Preparing Fact Sheets
- Educating and organizing others
- Staying informed on the issues and legislation

## **Who Should be the Focus of Your Advocacy?**

- Your elected Senators and Representatives
- The Governor and other elected officials
- Legislative Committee chairs
- Legislative Committee members
- Legislative leadership
- Legislative staff and analysts
- State Agency officials and staff
- The general public

## **Why Advocate?**

- You have a vote and voice
- Policymakers do listen
- You are a respected member of the community
- Your credibility, knowledge, and caring will help influence others
- When you advocate for change, you change

***To find the contact information for your legislators, visit:***

<http://legis.state.nm.us/lcs>

**Say Thank You**  
**Everyone likes to feel appreciated. Legislators work very hard. Whether or not your legislation passes, be certain you thank your legislative champion.**

## Legislative Advocacy Tools

### Write a Letter/Email

Letters are an important and effective way to influence legislation. Letters and emails are a quick and easy way to get your voice heard. Often, if you are advocating with an organization, the group will draft a “form letter” to send to your legislators. A “form letter” is better received if you personalize it before you send it. What is most important, however, is that your letter be clear, passionate, and to the point. You can mail, fax or email your letter to legislators.

#### Helpful Hints:

- Keep your letter short.
- Identify yourself.
- Make your position clear.
- Tell your legislators *exactly* what you want them to do, and how you want them to vote.
- Tell your legislators how and why the legislation affects you and the children and families you work with. Use personal stories.
- Do not threaten, browbeat, or be nasty.

### Make a Phone Call

A phone call to your legislator is an effective way to register your position on proposed legislation. It is important for you to have all the information about the issue before you call.

#### Helpful Hints:

- Identify yourself by name and address.
- Identify the bill or issue by name and number (if possible).
- Ask for your legislator’s stance on the bill/issue.
- Briefly state your position on the issue and how you would like your legislator to vote.
- Do not argue if the legislator or staff has an opposing view.
- If asked, do not guess the answers to questions. If you do not know, say so, and then call back with accurate information.
- If the legislator or the staff person needs more information, supply it as quickly and clearly as possible.
- If you must leave a message, keep it simple, state your name, phone number, and request.

# Legislative Advocacy Tools

## Visit Your Legislator

The cornerstone of legislative advocacy is *relationship*. Personal visits are an important way to build relationships and are a highly effective way to help legislators understand your position on an issue. Legislators welcome visits from constituents. They want you to be involved. However, keep in mind that legislators are often very busy. Plan ahead, and use your time well.

During the session, it may be difficult to schedule a meeting with your legislator. Often, important conversations are had while walking between meetings or in the hallway.

### ***SUPPORT CHILDREN, NOT POLITICAL PARTIES***

*Most child advocates feel that it is very important to be nonpartisan and to work with legislators from both parties. In most cases, legislation will be more likely to succeed if it has sponsors from both parties.*

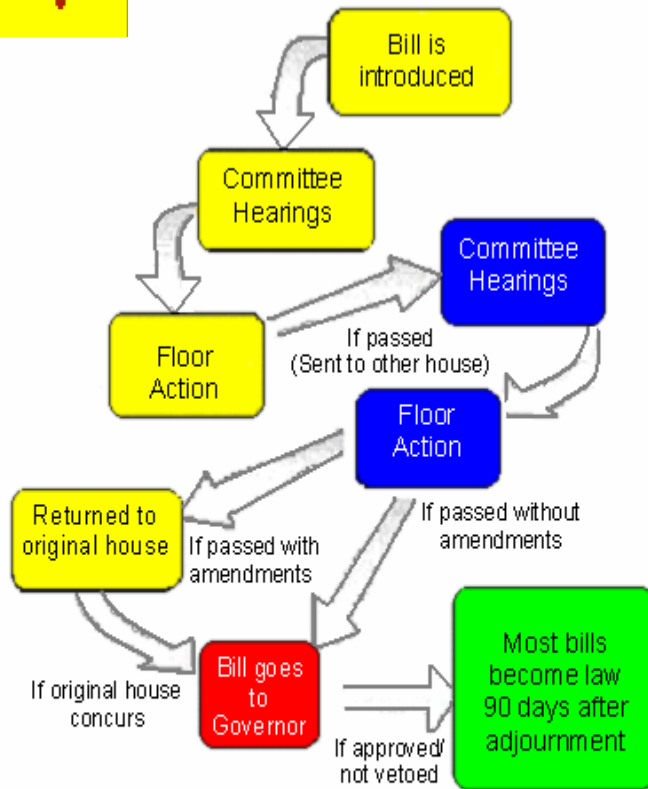
## Helpful Hints:

- Do your homework. Become familiar with your elected representatives and their staff. Learn about their priority issues and wider interests.
- Prepare a good fact sheet ahead of time.
- Do not use jargon, technical terms, or acronyms.
- Be prepared to go over the basics of your issue.
- Be prepared to explain how the bill or issue will affect you and the children and families you work with.
- Be firm, but friendly. A commitment on how your legislator will vote should never be forced; however, once your legislator is aware of the issue and your position, it is not too soon to start asking for a commitment.
- Before leaving, ask how you can be of help to them, i.e. get them more information, talk with others, etc.
- Thank them for their time and/or for anything they've done recently with which you agree.
- Memorize a 90 second speech about your issue:
  - Who you are and any organization you belong to
  - The topic you came to talk about
  - What you want them to do, how you want them to vote
  - Reference the fact sheet
- Follow up with a letter, thanking them for their time.

## Prepare a Good Fact Sheet—Helpful Hints:

- Keep it short, accurate, and interesting – one or two pages.
- Make the Fact Sheet easy to read, with sub-headings and bullet points.
- Include only the most compelling and useful statistics.
- Do not use long sentences or wordy paragraphs.
- Use stories and examples to convey complicated points.
- Draw a conclusion and recommend the action that needs to be taken.
- Include the name, address, phone number, website and/or email address of the organizing group or contact person.

# New Mexico Legislature Nuts and Bolts



There are 112 Legislators in New Mexico:  
42 Senators and 70 Representatives

The Legislature meets every year. In odd-numbered years there is a sixty day session. In even-numbered years there is a thirty day session.

Bills are created and introduced for a variety of reasons. Most bills come from:

- Executive Branch
- Interim Committee work
- Legislator concerns
- Memorial study committees
- Constituent requests
- Interest groups

Once a bill is introduced, it is assigned to one or more committees. The fewer committees a bill is assigned to, the better chance it has of making it to the Governor's office.

## The following are the standing committees:

### House

Appropriations and Finance  
Agriculture and Water Resources  
Business and Industry  
Consumer and Public Affairs  
Education  
Energy and Natural Resources  
Government and Urban Affairs  
Judiciary  
Labor and Human Resources  
Transportation  
Taxation and Revenue

### Senate

Conservation  
Corporations and Transportation  
Education  
Finance  
Indian and Cultural Affairs  
Judiciary  
Public Affairs  
Rules

*To track a bill online visit:*

<http://legis.state.nm.us/lcs>

### References:

Prevent Child Abuse Indiana [www.pcaain.org](http://www.pcaain.org)  
Understanding Health Care: Policy, Politics & Advocacy,  
Policy Matters

This resource is jointly published by:



New Mexico Court Improvement Project  
Collaborating to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families

