



Advocacy 101

* vecaa.org * 802-229-4281 *
a program of the VT Community Loan Fund



VERMONT
EARLY CHILDHOOD
ADVOCACY ALLIANCE

Who We Are

The **Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance** is a statewide, independent, advocacy coalition formed in 2000 to bring together the early childhood community on policy priorities in the areas of health, safety, food, economic security and early care and education.

The work of the **Alliance** focuses on three primary areas:

- Building a **coalition** of organizations and advocates across many issue areas
- Creating an annual **Legislative Agenda** to focus advocacy during the sessions
- Providing **advocacy support** through training sessions, updates, grassroots outreach and strategic planning assistance



Session Outline – Key Topics

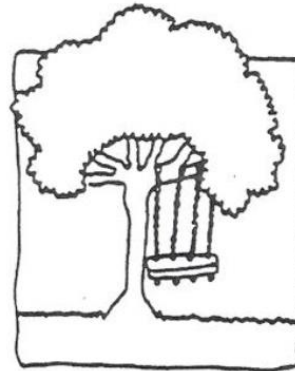
- Why your voice and real stories matter
- Review of how the Vermont Legislature works
- Effective citizen advocacy
- Moving from “constituent” to “advocate”



How a Bill Becomes Law



AS INTRODUCED



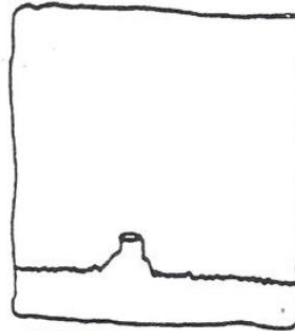
AS AMENDED IN
COMMITTEE



AS AMENDED ON
SECOND READING



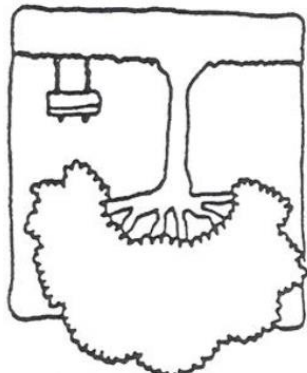
AS ENACTED



AS FUNDED BY JOINT
BUDGET COMMITTEE



AS IMPLEMENTED BY
THE STATE AGENCY



AS REPORTED BY THE
MEDIA



AS UNDERSTOOD BY
THE PUBLIC



WHAT WAS ACTUALLY
NEEDED

When it comes to legislators, government, and the “sausage-making” process, you need to keep your sense of humor...

Why Your Voice Matters

Advocates' stories matter!

- You are here because there are issues you care about – that impact your life, work, family, and community – that you want to and can impact.
- Because of your connections in the community and to specific programs and services, often *only you* can provide important information and context for that issue that will make change possible.
- Lobbyists and professional advocates aren't "real people" – legislators want to hear from you, as someone with lived experiences and expertise.



Telling a Story: Effective Citizen Advocacy

Citizen Advocacy is:

1. Telling a story, and ...



2. Making a point, ...



3. In a coordinated way ...

4. (...and not being afraid to do it!)

Telling a Story

Your goal is to share something about your situation...

- Be real – you’re not an expert, you’re a real person.
- Give your “target” a little bit of context as well as the “story” – who you are, why this matters to you, why this matters to the community.

...but not too much!

- Try to stay focused – pick one part of your story to focus on, you may have just 90 seconds to make your point.
- Don’t try to say everything – remember, it’s a team sport!



We do this work because citizens can make a significant impact on legislators' decisions and the lives of those we serve!

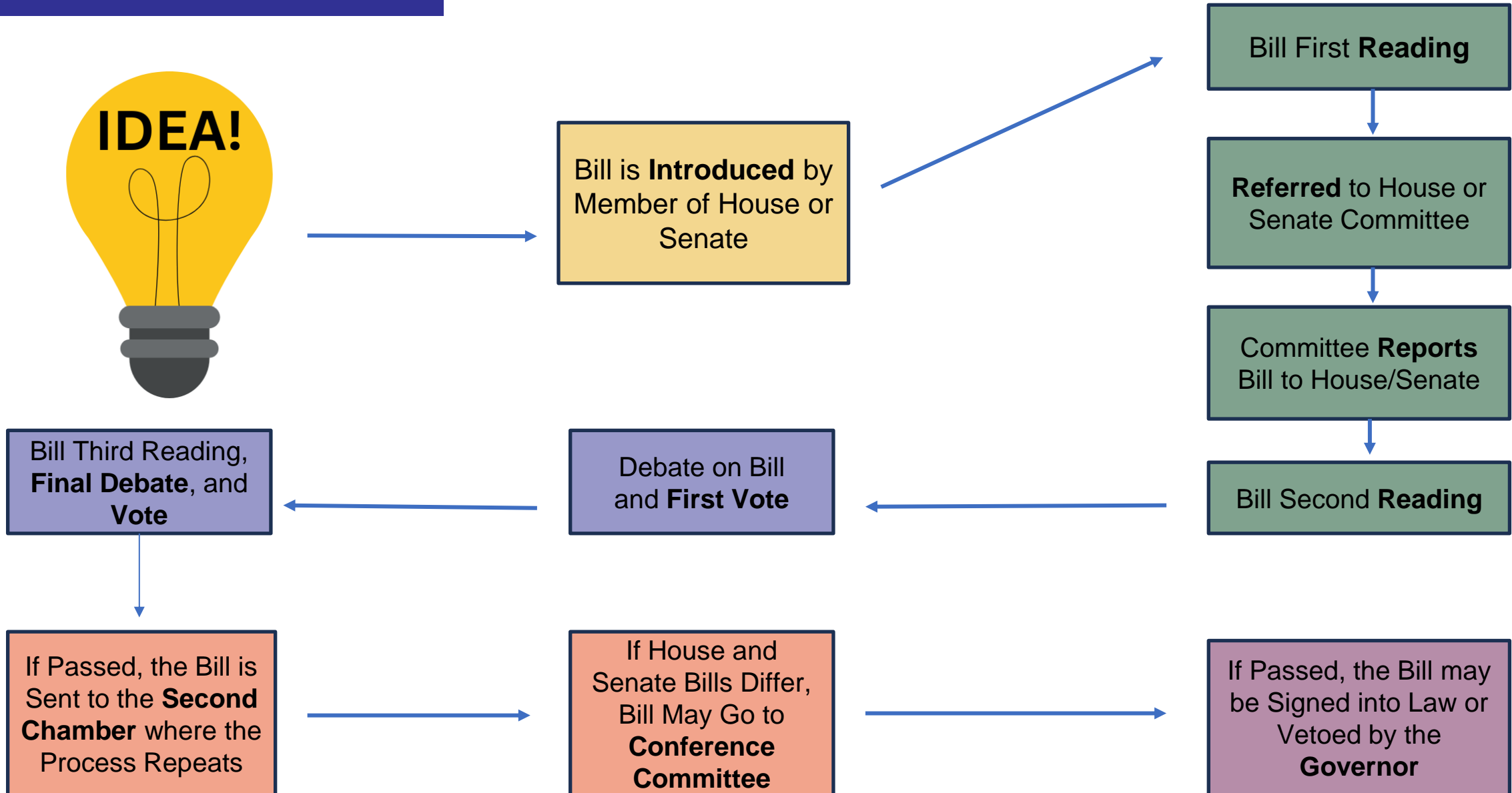


Why the Mechanics of Vermont's Legislative Process Matter

- Legislators respect (and need) clarity and accuracy when you refer to bills and their path through the process.
- It's good to check in with other advocates to make sure you clearly understand the status of your issue.
- Knowing these mechanics will help you know what to say, when, and to whom, and help your comments be heard.



Bill Consideration Process - How a Bill Becomes a Law



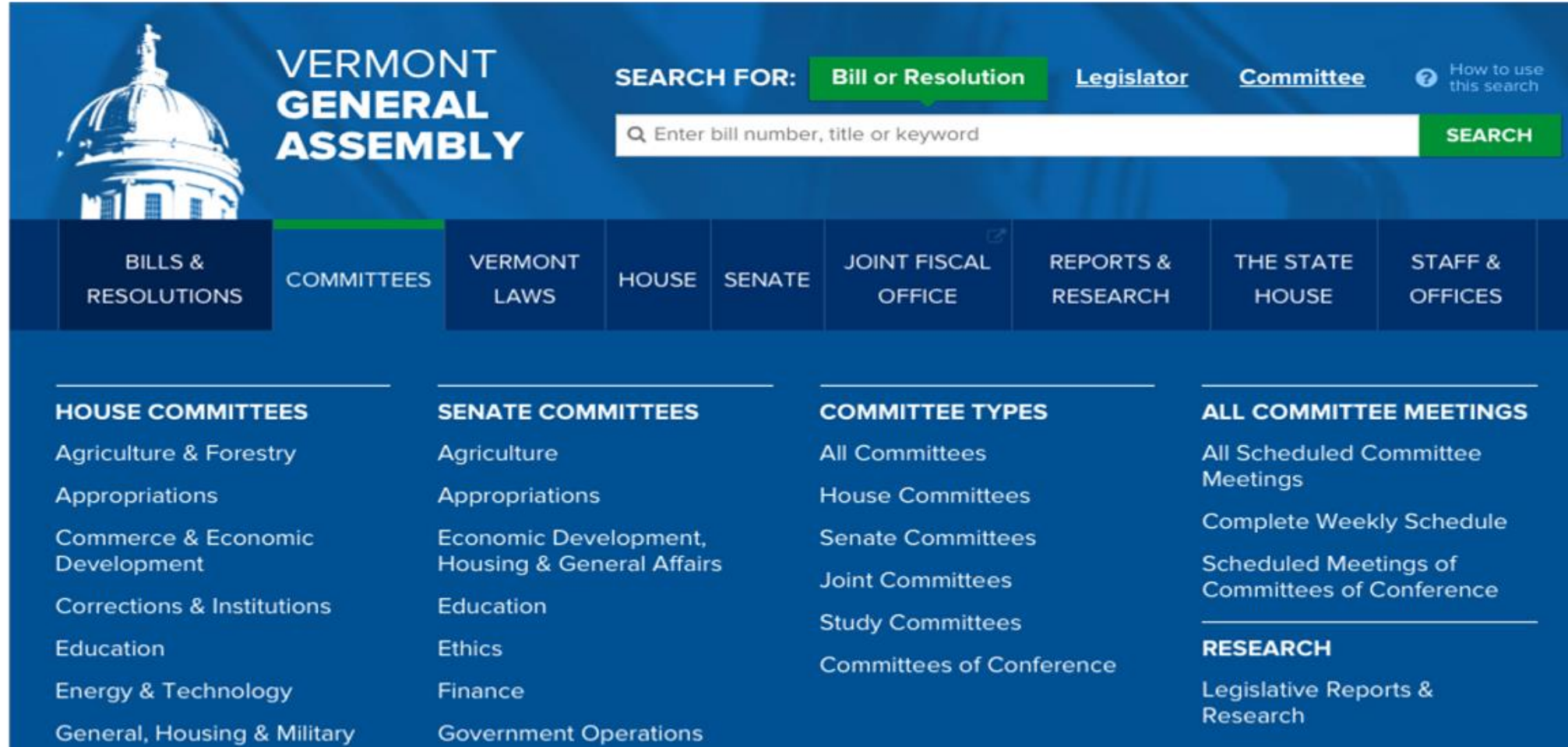
State Budget-Writing Process

(less variation than other bills, more certainty)

Mid-January	Governor releases Recommended Budget for next fiscal year (July – June)
Jan. – Feb.	House Appropriations Committee reviews Gov’s Recommend, works on House version of budget bill
Feb. – March	Senate Appropriations Committee reviews Gov’s Recommend
Late March	House passes their version of the budget bill
April	Senate Appropriations Committee reviews House Budget bill, Senate passes their version of the bill
May	House/Senate Conference Committee reviews differences and develops compromise budget bill, which is passed by both chambers and then sent to the Governor for signature, passage without signature, or veto

Note: The Vermont Constitution requires that any revenue bills be passed first in the House and then be considered by the Senate. By tradition, the same is true of the state budget.

Legislative Committees/Website



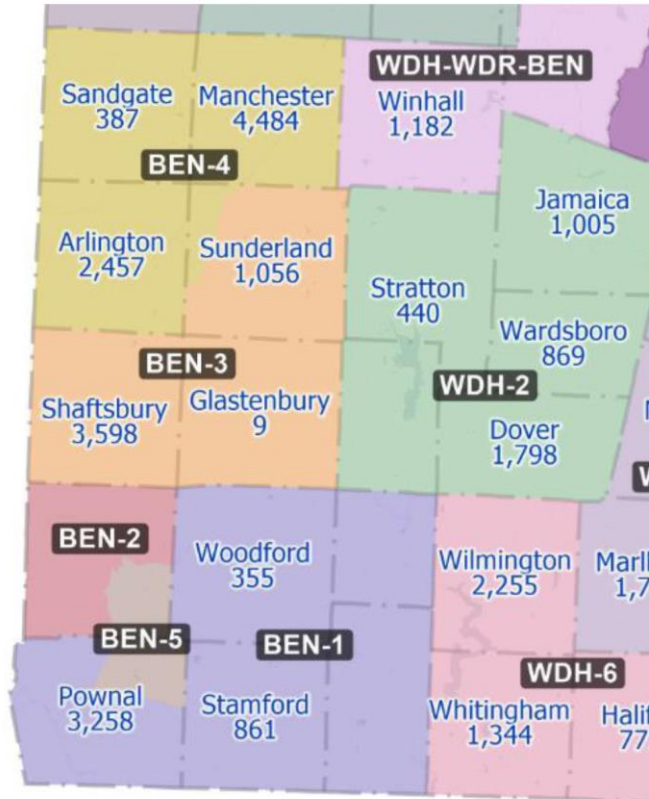
The screenshot shows the Vermont General Assembly website. At the top left is the Vermont State Capitol dome. To its right is the text "VERMONT GENERAL ASSEMBLY". Further right is a search bar with the text "SEARCH FOR:" followed by three buttons: "Bill or Resolution" (highlighted in green), "Legislator", and "Committee". Below these is a search input field with the placeholder text "Enter bill number, title or keyword" and a green "SEARCH" button. To the right of the search bar is a link "How to use this search". Below the search bar is a horizontal navigation menu with the following items: "BILLS & RESOLUTIONS", "COMMITTEES" (highlighted in green), "VERMONT LAWS", "HOUSE", "SENATE", "JOINT FISCAL OFFICE", "REPORTS & RESEARCH", "THE STATE HOUSE", and "STAFF & OFFICES". Below the navigation menu are four columns of links:

- HOUSE COMMITTEES**
 - Agriculture & Forestry
 - Appropriations
 - Commerce & Economic Development
 - Corrections & Institutions
 - Education
 - Energy & Technology
 - General, Housing & Military
- SENATE COMMITTEES**
 - Agriculture
 - Appropriations
 - Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs
 - Education
 - Ethics
 - Finance
 - Government Operations
- COMMITTEE TYPES**
 - All Committees
 - House Committees
 - Senate Committees
 - Joint Committees
 - Study Committees
 - Committees of Conference
- ALL COMMITTEE MEETINGS**
 - All Scheduled Committee Meetings
 - Complete Weekly Schedule
 - Scheduled Meetings of Committees of Conference

Below the "ALL COMMITTEE MEETINGS" section is a **RESEARCH** section with the link "Legislative Reports & Research".

www.legislature.vermont.gov

Vermont Legislators are approachable...



Small districts and no staff...

...wear multiple “hats” ...

Sen. Becca White
Grocery Worker



Rep. Kate McCann
HS math teacher



Sen. Brian Collamore
Former radio show host



...but their legislative work environment is very intense.



Photo Credit: VTDigger



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That's why understanding the process and the status of your issue is important.

Be clear about what is happening with your issue:

- What is the status of the bill in the committee consideration process
 - “The bill will be coming to your committee next week, which is why I’m talking to you now...”
- What legislators are supporting the bill and working with you
 - “Sen. Smith is the lead person on this issue in the Senate – you could talk with her about...”
- What organizations are you working with, supporting, collaborating with
 - VTAEYC is working with LGK and other Alliance members on this issue...”

This clarity will help legislators “place” your comments appropriately, hear what you have to say, and increase the chances that they connect their interaction with you to other discussions they are having.



“Successful connections with legislators rely on repeated, quality interactions, on the legislators’ own terms, at times when the legislators are most approachable.”



Effective Citizen Advocacy:

Three Key Phrases

- “Pleasant, Patient, Persistent” – then repeat
- “Compelling, not comprehensive”
- “It’s a team sport!”



Advocacy - Know the Rules

- Be prepared
 - Know your issue
 - Have a clear “ask”
 - Know your issue “lead”
- Be friendly, build relationships
- Plan on more than one contact – make a call and then follow up, attend hearings and come more than once, etc.
- Know the difference between lobbying and advocacy

Jargon Alert!



Be Coordinated or, “It’s a team sport”

Whether there is a formal agreement on it or not, most issues have a “lead organization”.

- Know who the “lead is, and work with them.
- Every issue on the Alliance’s annual Legislative Agenda had a lead organization.

You increase your chances of success if you are part of a coordinated effort.

- “Compelling not comprehensive” – others are speaking out too.
- You are not the expert, you’re not supposed to have all the answers.
- Your “point” is part of a larger, statewide strategic effort.



Be Coordinated or, “It’s a team sport”

Be clear about who exactly you are representing.

- As an individual citizen that cares about the issue:
 - “From my personal experience I know that...”
- As a member of a group that has taken a position on the issue:
 - “My organization listened to our membership and has decided that we...”
- As a leader of an organization that has taken a point on the issue:
 - “Speaking on behalf of our Association, we feel strongly that...”

This clarity will help legislators “place” your comments appropriately, and help your comments be heard as you intend them to be.



Moving from “Constituent” to “Advocate”

Spectrum of Engagement and Your Goals

NEW	JUST A BIT	ACTIVELY INVOLVED	SPOKEN OUT	BECOME A RESOURCE
“I’ve never advocated before.”	“I’ve left a message for my legislator or signed a petition on an issue.	“I’ve submitted comments on an Administrative program or a bill, or attended Early Childhood Day at the Legislature.”	“I’ve met directly with my legislator on an issue or testified in a committee hearing.”	“I’ve monitored an issue in the State House by attending Legislative Committee meetings and working with lobbyists.”



Moving from “Constituent” to “Advocate”

Investing Time, Fostering Relationships

Making this shift to being an advocate involves:

- Spending time connecting with legislators
- Collaboration with the early childhood community “team”
- Repeated follow-up over time

These interactions result in legislators:

- Seeing advocates as a resource for information and opinions
- Becoming accountable to advocates in the decision-making process



Moving from “Constituent” to “Advocate”: Investing Time, Fostering Relationships



Building relationships outside the State House

- Regional legislative meetings
- Attending other groups’ events
- Involving families and clients
- Getting assistance for clients

Constituents ask for help.

Advocates provide information that legislators want and need to know.



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Moving from “Constituent” to “Advocate”:

First Steps to Advocacy

- Find an easy first step – something small you can accomplish.
 1. Make time to read advocacy activation emails and information.
 2. Send an email to a legislator on an issue you care about.
 3. Make a connection with a legislator, even if it’s a social one.
- Understand what advocacy you can do – as part of your organization or as a citizen.
- Read up on your organization’s latest advocacy priorities.



Seeing Yourself Succeeding or, How not to be Afraid

- Advocacy is not for everyone. Try it out, see if you like it. If not, that's ok – remember, it's a team sport!
- Members of the community do this all the time.
- There are staff who are here to support you and help you succeed.



Seeing Yourself Succeeding or, How not to be Afraid

You can share your story in lots of places and lots of ways:

- in person either in the State House or in the community
- by email, text, or phone

Trust that legislators want to hear from you!



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We're here for you – please be in touch!

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