

How To's of Advocacy

Send an email to your member State Senator or House Member

Sending an email is a great way to get in touch with your member of the NH Legislature, providing an easy way for you to express your thoughts and concerns regarding various issues at the state and local level. It also allows you to build your courage as an advocate.

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/members/housemembers.html>

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/Senate/members/wml.aspx>

In your e-mail, make sure you engage your audience, state the problem, inform about solutions and give a call to action!

Get involved on social media

Many office holders now use social media as a primary communications tool, allowing constituents to ask them direct questions. These platforms can be used instead of or in addition to another method of contact.

Make a phone call to your Elected Officials

Calling your elected officials will help create a stronger relationship with your legislator and his or her office staff. This is a more personal form of advocacy and can be more effective.

Tips for a good phone call:

- Determine the reason for your call. Use your first call as a way to receive information or offer a thank you.
- Research and try to find a place of connection with your legislator.
- Script your call. Make what you say personal by adding a story about someone you know to the issue you're discussing.
- Practice! Run through the conversation out loud.

Write your member of Elected Officials

Elected officials need to hear from their constituents. They depend on you to educate them about what is happening in their district or town and what legislation is most important to their constituents. Writing a letter ensures that the people who make decisions on your behalf every day know how

you want to be represented. Introduce yourself and share why you care about the issue. Request a reply, and include all of your contact information.

Ask a question at a town hall meeting or other public venue

Going to an event where an elected official is speaking provides an excellent opportunity to thank him or her in public, make a particular request, or encourage stronger leadership on one of our issues. It is also a way to get the elected official to take a stand or create a platform on our issues when he or she might not otherwise pay attention to them. By presenting carefully prepared and powerful questions, you have the chance to influence members of the Legislature as well as educate the community in the room.

Tips on attending a town hall:

- Prepare questions ahead of time.
- Work in teams. If you aren't called on to ask your question, your teammate's might. Or he or she could ask a follow-up question if yours gets answered.
- Identify yourself, stay polite and remain focused.
- Follow up.

Arrange a site visit for your elected official

Schedule a visit for legislators in areas or at programs which serve children and families. These visits show them just how important these programs are to people in their constituency. These visits can make the difference in securing support for program priorities.

Tips for setting up a site visit:

- Choose a site that can illustrate the issue on which you're focusing.
- Contact your chosen site, propose a site visit, and negotiate two or three potential visit dates.
- Contact your legislator by letter with the request to accompany you to your site.
- Offer to provide background information on the target issue, on the site to be visited and the learning goals of the visit.
- Confirm the visit with both the site and the legislator a week beforehand and again the day before.

- Plan to be at the site early and help greet the legislator when he/she arrives.
- Thank the legislator and anyone accompanying them for their time and offer to schedule a de-brief session.
- Thank the site for their hospitality.

Write a letter to the editor

Tips on generating a letter to the editor:

- Be current.
- Construct your letter.
- Be clear and concise.
- Connect the dots between your community and the state or federal issue you're addressing.
- Be challenging.
- Mention the Legislator by name.
- Provide a Call to Action.
- Include your contact information.
- Coordinate your efforts.
- If your letter gets published, send a copy to your legislators and to us!

Sample Letter to the Editor

February 8, 2016

Letters-to-the-Editor

[Name of newspaper]

[Address]

[City, state, zip]

To the Editor:

Every afternoon in the United States, millions of children leave school with no organized activity or adult supervision awaiting them. Not surprisingly, the afternoon hours are when children are most likely to be the victims of crime and to engage in risky behaviors.

Afterschool programs provide a safe alternative. And that's one of many reasons we need quality afterschool programs—and many more than we have now.

Research from the Afterschool Alliance reveals that the parents of 18.5 million children not already in afterschool programs say they would sign up their kids if a program were available. Unfortunately, the economy has made it harder for afterschool programs to raise private funds, and local, state and federal budget cuts are forcing many programs to cut back their programs or close their doors. This week I was proud to join hundreds of afterschool supporters from around the nation in the Afterschool Alliance's Afterschool for All Challenge, meeting with, phoning and emailing our Members

of Congress and their aides to discuss the urgent need to fund afterschool programs. We'll all be better off if lawmakers heed that message.

Sincerely, [Your name]

[Your program]

[Your phone numbers, not for publication]

Write or generate an op-ed

Advocates with access to up-to-date, accurate information on our issues are perfect candidates for writing a powerful op-ed or for generating an opinion piece signed by an elected official or an influential community member.

Tips:

- Check the editorial page or the paper's website for instructions on submitting an op-ed.
- Try composing your op-ed using the same format you would use for a letter to the editor.
- Get in touch with how you personally feel about the issue and feel free to use personal examples, relating your message to your own experiences.
- It's often helpful to open with a story or anecdotes and then circle back around to it by referencing it at the end.
- Make sure there is a call to action for your legislators and/or your readers. An op-ed is a prominent piece that will be read by many people; use this opportunity to be bold in what you want.
- Make your piece current and relevant; relate to something that is happening now.

Sample Op Ed

Our Turn: It's time to support full-day kindergarten

Today, in the House Education Committee, bipartisan legislation to finally fully support full-day kindergarten will be heard. Full-day kindergarten has solid bipartisan support. In fact, Gov. Sununu expressed support for full funding of full-day kindergarten during the campaign, and recent polling commissioned by Save the Children Action Network shows about 70 percent of Granite State voters agree that funding full-day kindergarten should be a major budget priority.

The central mission of all our organizations – Save the Children Action Network, MomsRising and Every Child Matters in New Hampshire – is to give every child a strong start in life and an equal opportunity to succeed.

Evidence-based research shows that children from birth to age 5 who lack access to high-quality early learning programs often start to fall behind their peers, and many never catch up. A recent report from a Nobel Prize-winning economist in December 2016 shows an annual rate of return on investments in early childhood development for many children can be \$13 for every \$1 invested due to improved outcomes in education, health, sociability, economic productivity and reduced crime.

A full-day of learning offers greater social, emotional and intellectual benefits to kindergartners. They have more time to focus on activities, to reflect on what they have learned and to transition between tasks. Overall, children in full-day kindergarten programs are more likely than children in half-day kindergarten programs to devote time every day to reading, mathematics and social studies.

Further research demonstrates that children adjust well to the full-day format. While some may argue that full-day kindergarten is too much for kids, research shows that 5-year-olds are more than ready for a longer day. They also do better in a setting that allows them time to learn and explore activities in depth.

In New Hampshire and across the country, early childhood programs such as high-quality pre-kindergarten and full-day kindergarten have been shown to result in lasting gains in academic achievement, increased graduation rates and reduced crime rates. Specifically, full-day kindergarten closes achievement gaps between young children from minority and low-income families and their peers. By providing a solid foundation of learning to children from all backgrounds, full-day kindergarten programs ensure all students' academic, social and emotional success.

Investing in early-childhood education is the most effective way to break the cycle of poverty and help close the opportunity gap. These investments lay the foundation for success in school, career and life. The type of environment and the quality of interaction to which children are exposed in the first five

years of life greatly influence the outcomes of their adult lives. For these reasons and many more, investing in full-day kindergarten is a no-brainer.

We hope members of the Legislature will join us in support of adequately funding a full-day of kindergarten for all Granite State families.

It's a smart investment in the future of our children and our state.

(Lindsay Hanson is the New Hampshire government relations manager for Save the Children Action Network. Christina D'Allesandro is the New Hampshire director at MomsRising. MaryLou Beaver is the director of Every Child Matters in New Hampshire.)

Host a table in your community

This can be a fun way to educate members of your community and get information out on issues regarding the wellbeing of children and families. This is a very non-threatening way for organizations and programs to provide people with information on what they do and answer any questions community members may have.

Where to set up a table:

- Festivals
- Volunteer Fairs
- Community Expos
- Conferences

Organize a letter writing meeting in your community

Letter-writing meetings are a great way to engage people in advocacy that is quick, easy, and effective. It gives people the opportunity to learn about and take action on an issue in a friendly casual setting. Determine your topic and goal for your work: do you want to speak to a member of Congress, to a state legislator, your Mayor, to the media, or even to the Governor? Provide plenty of the action sheets you'll be using, paper and pens, envelopes and stamps and address of the office of your chosen legislator.

Speak to a local community group

A great advocacy tool is your own voice. Make a presentation about your organization or an issue regarding the wellbeing of children and families. Make sure to identify an audience that shares an interest in your issues and the work you do.

Host a successful outreach meeting

By providing the opportunity for others to learn about programs and services from which they benefit, you not only strengthen your work in advocacy, you provide an effective and successful outlet for others who want to make a difference but are not sure how.

Once you've created a guest list, maximize the effect of your meeting by:

- Designating a point person to arrange your logistics (location, locking/unlocking of facility, technology needs, building signage)
- Assigning responsibility for hospitality food and drink helps make everyone feel welcome!
- Having a sign-in sheet for attendees.
- Be up front at the start of your meeting about your purpose –getting new advocates.
- Weave a personal story to underscore how powerful your program is and what their participation could mean for children and families.
- Use strong, relevant quotes from people whose name or position is familiar to the audience.
- Make the most of it: Celebrate the new people who sign up or donate and have clear next steps for those who are getting involved. (Have your next meeting scheduled or give enough time to do schedule it before people leave your event.)