

Advocacy Tips

from

Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented

There are three main ways to influence policymakers on issues related to gifted and talented children and their educational needs.

WRITE.....CALL.....VISIT

Write a letter or send an email. Writing to a policymaker is a simple, yet powerful way to tell your story. As few as five letters from constituents can impact the way an official views an issue. Your one letter can have the impact of many letters. Your letter or email should: • state your name and address • identify the law, program rules, or budget cut you are concerned about • briefly and clearly state how you or people you know will be affected by the decision • avoid angry language.

The format for your communication should be as follows: Date

The Honorable (first and last name) Colorado House of Representatives (or Colorado Senate) Colorado State Capitol 200 E. Colfax Ave., Rm 271 Denver, CO 80203

Dear Representative (or Senator)

State the issue, your position, your rationale, facts/data, and how to contact you. Then thank them for their consideration. This format works for email as well.

For the State Board of Education address to:

Honorable (first and last name) Colorado State Board of Education 201 East Colfax Ave., Denver, Colorado 80203 Email: state.board@cde.state.co.us (This is a generic site, some members have specific addresses.)

Make a telephone call: When calling an official's office, have the same information at hand as outlined in the letter writing section. Often times you will be leaving a message on a machine or with a staff member. You may want to write out a script of what you want to say ahead of time.

Make a personal visit: One of the most effective ways you can advocate for your cause is to personally visit the policymakers you are trying to influence. Good communication skills enable you to approach them and gauge their position and commitment to your issue. Before your visit you should try to learn more about them by visiting their website, researching their voting record and determining their committee membership. Use the following guidelines for your visit.

Guidelines for Personal Contact One of the most effective ways to influence the decisions of a policymaker is in face to face visits. Frequent contacts are necessary to associate your face and name with your cause. Whether you plan to meet one-on-one or with a group, plan the meeting and develop an agenda to cover all the points you wish to make. Pick just one or two issues to discuss. If it will be a first time meeting, select an issue about which he/she may be sympathetic-or at least open minded.

Here are some simple steps to follow: • Make an appointment. If you drop by without an appointment, you may wait, or you may force him/her to postpone other commitments, thereby creating negative feelings before you begin. **BE ON TIME!** • Always introduce yourself, even at a second or third meeting. Don't put the person in the awkward position of having to ask for your name. • Get down to business quickly. Begin on a positive note. State the Bill number, title and author, or state the issue. State your position and what action you would like the legislators to take. • Thank them for previous support. Policymakers like to know that you know of their record. If you don't know their record, thank them for taking time to meet with you. • Be specific, be clear, and be simple. Provide information about how this issue impacts their constituency and people throughout the state. Use fact sheets, charts, statistics, etc. • Use personal stories or anecdotes. Remember, your job is to persuade...and a personal story will leave an image that will be remembered when voting time comes. • Ask what you can do. Ask if you can provide further information, arrange a tour of a program, contact others, etc. • Leave written materials. Provide only one page which can be filed and referred to as questions arise. • Thank the legislator again for his/her time. Be brief.

Tips for the Advocate

Tips for working with policymakers if...

They agree with your position. 1. Thank them and ask for them to take a leading role on the issue. 2. Ask for advice about other contacts and strategies. 3. Ask them to influence others.

They are undecided about your position. 1. Thank them and present your arguments as concisely as possible. 2. Determine their concerns and provide information as needed. 3. Get back to them. Keep in touch until they have made up their minds.

They are against your position. 1. Determine how strongly they are opposed. If not too strongly, try to persuade them to change their mind. 2. If not strongly opposed, ask them to refrain from lobbying against your position. 3. Continue to provide relevant and updated data related to your issue. 4. It's okay to say "thank you" and walk away.

Adapted from information provided by the Maine Women's Lobby.

Tips for Effective Testimony

Etiquette- Each policymaking body has its own rules of etiquette. Those may be formal and available to speakers or they may be informal. It is important to ask the body's staff for specific information. In general here are some tips.

- Address the committee or board with "Chairman and members of the committee (board)- substitute "Madam Chairman" if the committee is headed by a woman. • Speak only after being recognized by the Chairman. If you are asked questions, respond to them only after you have been recognized by the Chairman. • Introduce yourself with your name and where you're from or whom you represent. (i.e. "My name is Anna Lucero, I am from Colvan, Colorado. I am the mother of a son who is highly gifted but not adequately served." Or "I am a 6th grade teacher working with gifted children in my rural classroom.") • Get right down to business. • Identify the issue, bill, or rule you are addressing. • What action should be taken and how it would impact gifted students. • Include a personal anecdote. **YOUR STORY.** • Close by repeating the desired action. • Thank them.

Bring at least 25 handouts of no more than 2-3 pages with bulleted points. Hand them to the designated staff.

Adapted from information from the Maine Women's Lobby