

National Down Syndrome Congress Convention
Speaker Spotlight



**ADRIAN FORSYTHE &
CHAPMAN BRYANT**



**Engaging
Elected
Officials**

Adrian Forsythe

- I am 35 years old and from Prince George's County, Maryland
- I founded Empathy321 which supports the development of self-advocacy skills and empowerment and promotes full community inclusion for people with Down syndrome.
- I am employed by the University of Maryland as a Peer Advocacy Specialist in the TerpsEXCEED program. In addition, I am a National Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition (NDAC) member.
- I graduated from the George Mason University LIFE Program with concentrations in theater and communications.



Chapman Bryant II

- Policy and Advocacy Associate with the National Down Syndrome Congress
- Policy Areas: Social Security and healthcare
- Previously interned in the U.S. House of Representatives and worked in the U.S. Senate for Senator Roger F. Wicker (R-MS) handling healthcare policy
- Anna Brooke Bryant – sister with Down syndrome



Effectively Engaging Elected Officials 101

- What is Advocacy?
- Where do you start?
- Staying Informed
- Take Action
- Engage on Social Media
- Tell Your Story
- The Power of Self-Advocates
- Staff Relationships
- Partnerships and Follow-up



What is Advocacy?

- Dictionary: the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal
- Grassroots advocacy: collective action at the local level by individuals (“ordinary citizens”) to effect change
- Telling your personal story to try to turn “what is” into “what should be”; putting a real face on the issues
- Providing education and information to elected officials and the broader community about issues, problems, and concerns
- Is it the same as lobbying? NO. But lobbying can be a part of advocacy efforts
- Continuum of advocacy activities depending on comfort level, time, and passion for the issue.
- **Who is an advocate? YOU ARE!**

Be Informed. Stay Informed.

- Check out disability policy-related websites for information such as:
 - policy statements (healthcare, labor, etc)
 - issue briefs (find the list on the NDSC website)
 - Webinars (live or archived)
- E-newsletters from various disability organizations such as:
 - National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC)
 - Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
 - The Arc – federal & state
 - Global Down Syndrome Foundation (GLOBAL)
 - National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
 - National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS)
- Sign up for NDSC Action Alerts (<https://www.ndsccenter.org/political-advocacy/take-action-stay-informed/>) and alerts from other organizations

Be Informed. Stay Informed.

- Participate in training opportunities such as:
 - Advocacy Training Boot Camp
 - Disability Policy Seminars
 - Down Syndrome Advocacy Conference (D.C.)
 - Partners in Policymaking
 - Your state likely has opportunities through other disability organizations. Jawanda will share this in a later presentation.
- “Like” and “Follow” NDSC and other disability policy organizations on social media
- News sources
 - Disability Scoop
 - The Hill
 - Politico
 - Major Newspapers (NYT, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post)

Where do you start?

Finding and Contacting Elected Officials

- How to contact elected officials (comprehensive) <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>
- U.S. House of Representatives <https://www.house.gov/>
- U.S. Senate <https://www.senate.gov/>
- <https://www.commoncause.org/find-your-representative/addr/>

Tracking Federal Bills (sign up for alerts)

- <https://www.congress.gov/>
- <https://www.govtrack.us/>

State Legislature and bills

- <https://legiscan.com/>
- <http://www.ncsl.org/aboutus/ncslservice/state-legislative-websites-directory.aspx>

Complete list including
websites can be found
on the NDSC Website



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Take Action: Call and Call Again

- Elected officials want to hear from constituents
- No need to be an expert (calls take 2-3 minutes each)
- Staff keep tallies of total calls for & against a certain issue
- Use script from Action Alerts and add a personal touch
- Watch for “Call-In Days” – need critical mass of calls on a particular issue



Take Action: Send an Email



- Adapt script from Action Alert and add personal touches
- Email is more effective once relationship is established
- Email communication will probably be with staff
- Consider attaching a one-pager, links or pictures, but not too much

Engage on Social Media

- Use real-life relationships to build relationships on social media
- “Like”, “Follow” & “Friend”, & Tag your elected officials so that you can interact with them
- Most communication staffers manage their member's social media accounts
- Twitter is the most common way to interact with staff and urge them to act – use @handles and #hashtags
- #Downsyndrome is the most used hashtag in our community
- **Be careful what you say: Social Media is forever**

Follow NDSC on Social Media!



@thendsc



@ndsccongress



@NDSC



National Down Syndrome Congress



@NDSCCENTER



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Tell Your Story

- Your most powerful tool is your story!
- A one-page leave-behind can be used in many situations - Melissa will talk about this in a later presentation

Include:

- Contact information including street address, state, zip code (constituents have power), phone, email, Twitter handle, etc.
- Photo – action or otherwise
- A few sentences about yourself (where you work, go to school, your interests)
- The issue you are addressing and why you are asking
- Thank you



Power of Self-Advocates

- Self-advocates are THE MOST EFFECTIVE advocates
- Engage them in all aspects of advocacy
 - Can bring one-pager about themselves to meetings
 - Effective on social media
 - Provide necessary tools and trainings so they can meaningfully participate
 - Public speaking workshops
 - Participation in advocacy trainings, conferences, Hill Days



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Staff Relationships

- Make efforts to get to know the staff
- Visit staff in person at the local office and DC office, if possible
- Invite them to events or to visit your school or non-profits
- Staffers may move to other offices, but your relationship may remain intact
- Coffees with staffers
- Attend functions such as receptions
- Welcome staff into your home (if possible - friendly conversation)
- RESPECT



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Important Notes from Staffers

- If possible, always start the meeting by thanking them for past support on issues. People come in always wanting things, and it's great when constituents acknowledge past votes or leadership.
- Recommend coming in with just one or two main asks – include a letter or leave it behind and ask them to sign on to a bill.
- Recommend a thank you note to the Member and/or staff – an email or handwritten. It's appreciated and makes a difference.
- Follow up with the staffer with requested materials, thank you notes, and additional development of the legislation (hearings, statements, or state-specific endorsements)
- Always be respectful and courteous to staffers - patience is key on busy days. The staffers will appreciate a warm smile and a courteous meeting.

Partnerships and Follow-up

- Partnerships
 - Look for organizations and/or people with similar issues
 - This doesn't mean you have to agree on all topics
- Online groups and state coalitions
 - Statewide Down syndrome or multi-organization coalitions
 - Facebook advocacy groups - if your state doesn't have one, consider starting one.
- Don't stay in the Down syndrome bubble
- Follow-up
 - With thank you
 - With the information you promised
 - With others who may have the information you need
 - As you come across applicable stories, send them along
- Do not overdo it - pick your battles



Thank You

- Say thank you when you:
 - Call
 - Email/write
 - Visit in person
- Say thank you again:
 - On social media – all kinds
- Say thank you:
 - Even when they do not do what you want



Advocacy Reminders

- Respect – always keep conversations and public discussions respectful, even if you disagree
 - “no permanent friends, no permanent enemies”
- Recognition – elected officials like to be publicly thanked, and recognized on social media and in newsletters
- Realize the power of staff – staff can be even more important than the elected officials themselves

