Effectively Engaging Elected Officials 101

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Just a Mom

- Federal ABLE Act
- KS ABLE Act
- KS Emergency Safety Intervention (ESI) (Seclusion & Restraint) Legislation
- KS Organ Transplant Non-Discrimination Legislation
- KS ABLE Improvement Bills
- KS ESI Legislative Task Force
- KS Transition Bill of Rights Legislative Working Committee
- Olathe Public Schools Special Education Site Council
- Successfully advocated for school inclusion and daughter received diploma
- Founded #321Advocate online advocacy group
- Host www.thesassysoutherngal.com
Effectively Engaging Elected Officials 101

- Where do I start?
- Staying Informed
- Take Action
- Tell Your Story
- The Power of Self-Advocates
- Staff Relationships
- Partnerships and Follow-up
- Thank you
Where do I start?

Finding and Contacting Elected Officials
• How to contact elected officials (comprehensive) https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials
• US 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/

Complete list including websites can be found on the NDSC Website
Stay Informed

• Check out disability policy-related websites, policy statements and issue briefs (find list on NDSC website)
  – Webinars (live or archived)
• E-newsletters from various disability organizations (NDSC, NDSS, Global Down Syndrome Foundation, The Arc – federal & state, AUCD, National Disability Rights)
• Sign up for NDSC Action Alerts( https://www.ndsccenter.org/political-advocacy/take-action-stay-informed/) and alerts from other organizations
• “Like” and “Follow” NDSC and other disability policy organizations on social media
• News sources (Disability Scoop, The Hill, Politico, major newspapers)
• Google alerts on keywords
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

• Generic form from office – not overly effective
• 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
Take Action: 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
  • Sometimes this means following or liking an elected official with opposing viewpoints
• Twitter is most common way to interact with staff and urge them to act – use @handles and #hashtags
• Video clips effective way to share message
• Private social media exchanges rare but there are exceptions

• Staff often manage accounts
Take Action: Meetings

- Meet with your elected official and/or staff in D.C. or local office
- Always invite a self-advocate and let them do much of the talking (if possible)
- Keep in touch
  - Holiday cards, thank you note from child, send photos with news of your child’s accomplishments, etc.
  - Social media – Like, Re-tweet, publicly thank elected official and post pictures of your meeting
- Take a picture and express thanks on social media and by email/letter
Tell Your Story

Tell Your Story

• Your most powerful tool is your story!
• A one-page leave behind can be used in many situations

Include:
• Contact information including street address (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 Ask 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
Staff Relationships

- Make efforts to get to know staff
- Visit staff in person at 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
From the Mouth of a Staff Member

- 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.
- Stick to a couple main points. It’s hard with so many issues and groups for staff to remember more than 1 or 2 key items.
- Recommend coming in with just one or two main asks – include a letter or leave 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.

— Molly Haase, 17 years experience as a Congressional Staff Member
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
  - Consider starting a Facebook group for your state
- Don’t stay in Down syndrome bubble
- Follow-up
  - With a thank you
  - With information you promised
  - With others who may have information you need
  - As you come across applicable stories, send them along
Grassroots advocacy program to educate individuals with DS, family members and other allies about policy issues and give them advocacy tools to make their voices heard. Open to all abilities/levels of advocacy experience.

- Active closed Facebook group
- Quarterly update webinars and other resources

Visit [https://www.ndsccenter.org/political-advocacy/national-down-syndrome-advocacy-coalition/](https://www.ndsccenter.org/political-advocacy/national-down-syndrome-advocacy-coalition/) to sign up!
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

“My new representative won’t support anything that costs taxpayer’s money, but I was positive and thanked him for meeting with me.” ~ David Chaplin, Self-Advocate
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, recognized on social media and in newsletters
• *Realize the power of staff* – staff can be even more important than the elected officials themselves
Presented by:
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