



Advocacy Tips

Being an advocate is not difficult—and you don't have to be a political expert to fill this role. You are an expert in counseling—and that's the focus of your efforts here. In addition to your professional background, all you need to succeed as an advocate are a few basics about the way your Legislature works and information about what motivates legislators.

Your Role

You may be supporting a bill in the Legislature, opposing a bill, asking for a bill to be introduced, or asking for something from the governor or a state agency.

Understand the issue

- Take time to understand the issue and know how counseling and counselors are involved.
- No one expects you to know everything
- Use personal stories to demonstrate your position, or the reason you support or oppose a bill.
- Use data from an official source, if possible, or from another respected source that will show the need for what you are requesting.
- Let elected officials know how many people you are representing, either officially or unofficially.
 - If the issue affects school counselors, let them know how many there are statewide.
 - Let officials know, subtly, that you would be happy to give them credit in your group for whatever they do to help you.
- Find a champion in the Legislature who will support you.
 - Start with the ones who represent you, but look for others if your members aren't in the majority party or on the appropriate committee.
 - If you aren't a constituent of a potential champion, try to find someone who is and ask them for help.
- Learn about the committee your bill was—or will be—referred to,

- Learn about the members and the chair of that committee (They are going to have the most say about what happens to the measure)
- If your member is not on that committee, then ask them to contact committee members.
- Know your audience when meeting with a Legislator or staffer.
 - Look up his or her background, his or her district—and find reasons he or she would respond to your request.

Remember YOU are the expert on counseling!

- Your representatives should be happy to see you and to have this opportunity to learn more about the subject under consideration.
- You can explain how a bill that affects counselors or the state licensure board would work in the real world, and why it's good or bad.
- Often legislators have to vote on many bills that involve areas they aren't experts in, or know much about.
 - Frequently, they don't have much time to learn about the details. If you are explaining something to them in advance of a vote, you have a big advantage in getting your point of view across to them.
- You can also bring a Legislator's attention to an issue that they otherwise wouldn't pay much attention to among the hundreds of other bills under consideration.
- Remember, most state Legislators are working in the Legislature as a part-time job. You're the fulltime expert on counseling.

Here are few things that often motivate legislators:

- Job creation/retention
- Saving money for the government
- Try to frame your request with one of these, whenever possible, if that is not the case look for an issue that is currently getting a lot of attention: opioid abuse is one example. Try to relate your request to any of these important concerns.



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If you can't get to the state capital to meet with your representatives, there are other ways to work with them!

- An email message can be productive.
- In the email, outline the issue and why it is important to counselors.
- Include a personal story, some data, something relatable to the member (for example, "As a veteran, I know you see the need...")
- Also include a clear request about what you want the Legislator to do.
- A phone call can be even more productive.
- If you are polite and reasonably informed, you can learn things from the staffer you are talking to while you are getting your message across.
- Call the elected representative's local office and the office in the state capital or in Washington, D.C.
- Take the time to make a call—or continuing to make a call until you get through to a person

Getting and keeping informed:

- Get on the email list maintained by your Legislators.
- Follow your Legislators on social media.
- Check the American Counseling Association government affairs page on counseling.org for information.
- Visit the "Take Action" page on counseling.org to view and participate in the latest ACA Voter Voice campaigns.
- Set up Google Alerts on important issues.
- Google "[your state] political news" to find web sites that track political information.
- Follow specific bills on your state Legislature's bill-tracker, which may be found on the state's home page or use legiscan.com or openstates.org to follow bills.