

## COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS Part I

- Legislators want and need to hear from you about important issues.
- A face-to-face contact has more impact than a letter. A meeting makes it easier for people to begin developing a relationship. You do not need to come to Madison. Many legislators hold "office hours" in their home district. Or you can call and make an appointment to meet locally.
- A personal letter has more impact than a phone call. Stay away from form letters and petitions. They have the least impact.
- A big advantage of letters over phone calls or visits is that you can take time to think over what you want to say and how to say it.
- An advantage of meetings and phone calls is that if the legislator or aide doesn't understand something you've said, you can explain it immediately.
- Whether you meet in person, write or call, keep it brief. Legislators' offices are flooded with mail, FAXes, phone messages and visitors. If you can make your point quickly, clearly and simply, it will be absorbed and remembered.
- Use personal examples to make your point. These are much more memorable than statistics. Remember that you do not have to be an expert on an issue to contact your legislator.
- Focus on only one or two issues at a time. Each legislator needs to know a little about hundreds of issues each session.
- Timing is important: If your contact is made too early in the process, it may be forgotten. Follow the progress of the bill and make contact with the right people at the right time.
- Be informed and up-to-date. Know the status of the bill. If possible, have a few statistics, examples or fact sheets available.

## COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS Part II

Members of the State Legislature receive surprisingly few letters from their constituents. They pay a lot of attention to those they do receive. While letters have the most visual impact other than meeting your legislator face to face, a phone call or e-mail is better than no contact at all! However you decide to communicate, the following suggestions will be helpful in preparing what you want to say.

### Preparing Your Message

#### Why Tell Stories?

- Stories are what people remember
- Deepen their understanding of issues for children and families
- Makes the problem real
- Help them make decisions that lead to more supportive policies
- Help them find touchstones to our experiences in their own lives

#### What Story Should I Tell?

- Tell only the parts that best illustrate the point you want to make ex. What impact has being on a waiting list had on your child/family?
- Chose the story with the most impact ex. *“Because we could not afford to put a ramp on our house, my daughter has to leave her wheelchair at school. This means she has to crawl around at home. She is 13.”*
- Be honest. Don’t exaggerate.
- Don’t tell “hearsay” stories.
- Limit the length of your story to 1-2 minutes.

### Delivering Your Message

#### Your Message

- Introduce yourself-Who are you?
- Explain the issue or problem
- Share a personal story about how the issue is affecting your or your child’s life
- What you think needs to be done and what you want your legislator to do
- What will happen if the problem is fixed

#### Tips for Delivering Your Message

- Be informed, brief and clear about what you want
- Know what you want to say, try not to read from your notes
- Be respectful, patient and persistent
- The goal is not to be liked, but to be respected and listened to
- Deliver your basic message in about 2 minutes. Share additional information if time permits.
- Ask for a commitment-will they support...an increase in funding...
- Leave written information and your contact information

Find your legislators and their addresses at: <http://waml.legis.state.wi.us/>