WHY ADVOCATE AND HOW TO ADVOCATE

SAHELI

MADE BY AISHWARYA CHITOOR

INFORMED BY HUMAN RIGHTS

CAREERS

ADVOCACY....

ALLOWS ALL VOICES TO BE HEARD

PROTECTS HUMAN RIGHTS

HAS AN IMPACT ON THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

BUILDS GREATER UNDERSTANDING AMONGST PEOPLE

IDENTIFIES AVAILABLE RESOURCES AND SERVICES

EDUCATES OTHERS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

FOSTERS RESPECT FOR A CAUSE

ALLOWS US TO BE BETTER CONNECTED TO OUR VALUES

INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY

- WORKING WITH A SPECIFIC INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY
- ADDRESS THEIR NEEDS AND PROMOTE THEIR RIGHTS

SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY

- CREATING CHANGE AT THE SYSTEMS AND POLICY LEVELS
- CHANGE LAWS
- WORK TOWARDS MORE EQUITABLE SYSTEMS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

- ADVOCATING FOR THE PASSAGE OF LEGISLATION
- LOBBYING FOR FUNDING AND RESOURCES FOR SOCIAL PROGRAMS
- MONITORING IMPACT OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION
- BUILDING NETWORKS OF STAKEHOLDERS AND COALITIONS TO WORK TOWARDS COMMON GOALS

What is Legislative Advocacy?

Legislative advocacy refers to efforts to influence the introduction, enactment, or modification of legislation.

The most common means of legislative advocacy is direct lobbying, which entails contacting a legislator, sharing your views on an issue, and asking him or her to vote a specific way on a bill. This can be done with something as easy as a phone call or letter, or by a formal meeting with the legislator or staff person.

Why Advocacy?

One of the most important aspects of our system of government is that it is representative—those who make our laws represent us. But how can they represent us unless we let them know what we are thinking?

We can and should remind leaders of their responsibilities to their constituents and offer them constructive ideas. If we do, we can bring about public policy changes. It's not a difficult thing to do, and it doesn't take a lot of time. It just takes the will to act and speak out for yourself and on behalf of those who may not be able to speak for themselves.

Does Advocacy Work?

Recent research by the Congressional Management Foundation confirms that advocacy *does* make a difference. Legislative staffs reported that if a legislator had not reached a firm decision on an issue, individualized letters would have "a lot" of influence. (www.cmfweb.org)

What You Can Do

1. Write to Your Legislators.

Handwritten, mailed (or faxed) letters are still an effective way to communicate with your legislators.

Letter-Writing Tips:

- ✓ **Include your postal address,** especially on e-mails. Otherwise the office has no way of knowing that you are a constituent.
- ✓ **Personalize your message.** The most direct value comes from a single thoughtful letter generated by a constituent. A short story about your personal experience makes your letter more powerful.
- ✓ **Request specific action.** TCADP can provide you with our current message to the legislature. When possible, give the names of pending legislation or specific bill numbers.
- ✓ **Be concise.** Keep your letter short and to the point. One-page letters are ideal. Say what you need to say, but be as brief as possible.
- ✓ **Be informative.** Tell your legislator why this issue is important. Provide some brief information (reference to a case, a few statistics, etc.) to make the issue concrete and very real for your legislator.
- ✓ **Follow up.** Call your legislator's office and ask to speak to the aide in charge of criminal justice issues. Mention your letter and repeat your request. Get a definite answer to your request (a yes or no) or make plans to get a definite answer in the near future (calling back on a certain day, for example).

How the Legislative Process Works

The chart below shows the most common way that proposed legislation is enacted into law. Many bills, however, do not become law because their progress is stopped somewhere during the process—in committee, on the floor of the House or Senate, in conference or by gubernatorial veto.



Introduced in House → Referred to House Committee → Subcommittee Action → Full Committee Action → House Debates and Passes →

Introduced in Senate → Referred to Senate Committee → Subcommittee Action → Full Committee Action → Senate Debates and Passes →

House and Senate Members Reach Compromise → House and Senate Approve Compromise → Governor Signs Into Law

2. Visit Your Legislators.

A face-to-face visit with an elected official, or his/her staff, is the most influential form of advocacy. This direct lobbying can be time-consuming, but it can also be fun, interesting and rewarding. Elected officials have very demanding schedules. Don't be disappointed if you have to meet with a staff person—chances are good that they know more about the issue than the member anyway! Group visits are particularly effective and increase your chances of getting an appointment.

Legislative Visit Tips:

- ✓ **Do your homework.**
  Plan to discuss only one or two issues. Assume that you will have about 15 minutes.
  Find out how, or if, your legislator has voted on the issue(s) in the past. (Go to www.capitol.state.tx.us.)
  Gather facts about the issue(s). TCADP can provide you with information on the bill(s), background information and talking points.
  TCADP will provide handouts for you to leave with whomever you see.
- ✓ **Follow these guidelines during the visit.**
  Be polite. Dress neatly and professionally. Arrive on time. Relax.
  Be organized. Since you will have limited time to speak with your legislator, know what issues you want to address and stick to them.
  Be brief. State your position as succinctly and simply as you can. If the legislator has questions, you can expand on your remarks. Be prepared for questions and the give-and-take of the visit. If the member asks you for information that you do not have, say that you do not have it but will get it to them. Then follow through. Never lie or make things up.
  Target your message. Your goal is to make your legislator see how supporting your position serves his/her interest and philosophy. Your legislator may disagree strongly with your assumptions and with the goals you advocate. That's OK. Respectfully note that you hope that (s)he'll change his/her mind.
- ✓ **Follow up.**
  Write a note to the legislator or staff person thanking them for their time and attention they gave you during the visit. If you need to provide additional information, it may be included in this letter or given by phone or e-mail.

When is the Best Time?

Any time is a good time to communicate with your legislator.

Specific Opportunities.

- ➢ To urge legislators to introduce and cosponsor bills. This is particularly effective early in the legislative session, when members and staff are researching and developing policy positions.
- ➢ To thank them for their support once they sign on to a bill.
- ➢ To ask for a committee hearing.
- ➢ To recommend improvements or changes in a bill's provisions as it is considered at the sub-committee or committee levels.
- ➢ To urge a bill's passage (or defeat) when votes occur on the House and Senate floors.

CONTACTING YOUR LEGISLATORS.....

