



ADVOCACY 101

Advocacy is the deliberate process of identifying, embracing, and promoting an issue or cause. Most simply, it means standing up for what you believe in. There are many ways to advocate, and it is much more common than you might think. From persuading a neighbor to keep the noise level down to disputing charges on a dinner bill, advocacy is a part of everyday life.

Legislative advocacy specifically aims to influence those who make policy decisions, such as city council members, state legislators, and voters. It includes efforts to educate the public about an issue, as well as attempts to influence specific legislation through lobbying. The image of a professional lobbyist representing a large, powerful special interest group often comes to mind when we talk about legislative advocacy. However, some of the most important programs and laws we have today exist due to the efforts of small groups of dedicated citizens. You do not need to be an expert about the political process to be an effective advocate, and you *can* make a difference in your own life and the lives of those in need!

Ways to Advocate for Your Cause

- Vote. It is one of the important ways you can make a difference!
- Educate your community about an issue or cause that you support.
- Attend Town Hall meetings.
- Write, visit, or call your elected officials.
- Invite elected officials to visit your program.
- Organize rallies/media events.
- Testify on legislation at committee meetings.

Advocacy Do's

- Build relationships with legislators and other public policymakers before you need something.
- Seek partnerships with other individuals, organizations, and key stakeholders who share your position on an issue.
- Be prepared to deliver a clear and succinct message.
- Share personal stories. They are very powerful!
- Bring a fact sheet covering your main talking points.
- Be honest. Offer to call back or write back if you do not know the answer to a question.
- Recognize that advocacy is a process. You will not likely receive an immediate answer in support or opposition to your position.
- Send a follow-up note reiterating your talking points and thanking the individual for his/her time.

Advocacy Don'ts

- Arrive late or unprepared for a meeting.
- Disregard or disrespect legislative staff.
- Underestimate a legislator's desire to learn about an issue.
- Be afraid to take a stand on your issue.
- Give an unorganized or complicated presentation.
- Read off of a sheet of paper.
- Present your position without giving the audience chances to comment or ask questions.
- Make threats or argue.
- Give up!