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# UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY TECHNIQUES



*The relationship with representatives and officials at all levels of government is the key to successful advocacy.*

Psychologists need to not only understand the legislative process, but also feel comfortable communicating with government representatives. The information presented in this section

may appear very basic; however, it is important to apply these techniques to ensure effectiveness in getting your message across. Legislators' and their staff members' time is limited, so it is important to be succinct when advocating.

Many individuals have never contacted government representatives or officials, and it can be an intimidating process, even for seasoned professionals. Taking that first step can be frightening, but as with other behavior, it gets easier with practice.

*Networking and collaboration not only provide support, but they also increase the chances of being heard and making an impact.*

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# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

## IDENTIFYING AND FINDING INFORMATION

### ON YOUR LEGISLATORS\*



As noted in the previous section, the first step in communicating effectively with your representatives is determining the right person to contact. It is generally most effective to contact your own federal or state legislators. Indeed, if you are outside of an individual's district, his or her office will often tell you that they will not respond. ***Your elected official is your representative and obligated to listen to your views.***

Federal legislators maintain both a Washington, D.C. office and one or more offices in their home state/district. At the state, county, and city level, again, it may be best to start with your elected officials.

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\* The information in this section was taken from the APA Government Relations Office, *Advancing Psychology Education and Training: A Psychologist's Guide to Federal Advocacy* found at <http://www.apa.org/ppo/ppan/guides.html>. The newest guidebook can be found at <http://www.apa.org/ppo/pi/advocacyguide.pdf>.

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The easiest way to determine the names of your federal representatives is to access APA Government Relations, *Take Action* website at this address

<http://capwiz.com/apapolicy/home/>

**TO IDENTIFY THE  
NAMES OF YOUR  
FEDERAL  
REPRESENTATIVES  
VISIT THE APA  
GOVERNMENT  
RELATIONS, TAKE  
ACTION WEBSITE**

By simply typing in your zip code, you can access biographical data, local contact information, and your representative's home website.

To identify your state representatives, it is easiest to access your state's website. Once on your state's home page, look for a link to search elected officials by zip code or House and Senate rosters.

To identify your local/city officials, it is easiest to access your city's home webpage and look for a link to city council members or other elected officials.

This information may also be available in low-tech fashion through the blue pages (government pages) of your phone book.

**METHODS OF CONTACT**

Once you've identified the correct individuals, contact can be made through:

- Visits
- Phone Calls
- Faxes and E-mails
- Letters

**CONTACTING OTHER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS**

There may be occasions when it will be appropriate and helpful to contact members of Congress who do not represent you. For example, when the chair of a congressional committee wishes to monitor broad public opinion at a critical point in the legislative process, or when you have special expertise in a specific area in which a congressional committee or subcommittee is developing policy, your communication, whether informal or formal, is very important. In all instances, the APA Public Interest – Government Relations Office staff are available to assist and offer advice if you are interested in developing testimony or providing expertise on a particular issue.

To identify the names of your federal representatives and get contact information, including local addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses visit the **APA Government Relations, Take Action** website:

<http://capwiz.com/apapolicy/home/>

**The National Conference of State Legislators** has links to legislature home pages of each state.

<http://www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm>

**Congress.Org** also offers listings of state and local representatives by entering your home address.

<http://www.congress.org/congressorg/dbq/officials/?lvl=L>

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## ***HOW A LEGISLATOR MAKES VOTING DECISIONS\****

One lawmaker, U.S. Representative Lee Hamilton of Indiana, has described the process by which he and his colleagues decide how to cast their votes on legislation. This certainly can be applied to both federal and state representatives. Representative Hamilton begins with the statement:

“A question that has intrigued me is how various Members of Congress decide how to vote. Members cast about 400 votes a year on the most difficult and controversial issues on the national agenda. My impression is that in deciding how to vote, Members weigh three goals: They want to make good policy, gain respect inside Congress, and get reelected.”

Representative Hamilton then goes on to explain the major forces that mold his thinking on a given issue:

### **CONSTITUENTS**

***“Constituents are the most important influence on a Member’s voting decision.***

Whether Members are agents of their constituents’ wishes or free to exercise their own judgment is a classic question in a representative democracy. But all Members ask themselves on each vote where their constituents stand on the issue. On those issues where the constituency expresses strong preferences, the Member is almost certain to favor them.”

### **COLLEAGUES**

“Other Members of Congress are important sources of information because, as professional politicians, they will tailor their advice to a Member’s needs; they are often well-informed on the issue; and they are available at the time of the vote. Members also pay special attention to the other Members of their state delegation, because they share common interests and problems.”

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\* This summary was extracted from the Congressional Record and reprinted with the permission of AARP/VOTE. This section has been altered by APA Government Relations staff to reflect the change in political party leadership since Congressman Hamilton’s original presentation.

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## **LOBBYISTS**

“Interest groups are not the most, nor are they the least, important influences on Congress. Lobbyists can help or hinder a Member’s work. They can provide Members with easily digested information and innovative proposals.”

## **EXECUTIVE BRANCH OFFICIALS**

“The President is, in many respects, the chief legislator. With excellent sources of information, the ability to initiate legislation to appeal to all Americans, and to set the legislative agenda, the President has formidable power in the legislative process.”

## **PARTY LEADERSHIP**

Party members most often hear from their leadership in Congress (i.e., the Speaker and Majority and Minority Whips) on specific votes. On key or close votes, Members will be contacted by their party Whip, a Member responsible for counting and getting a set number of votes. However, it is important to note that both local and national political party leadership have an immense effect on a Member’s decisions on specific votes. Therefore, if you belong to a political party and are concerned about a vote, do not hesitate to contact your local party “chair” or the national office.

## **MEDIA**

“News media may have their greatest effect on Congress as agenda setters. By focusing attention on a particular issue, they can get the American people and the Congress to deal with it. In considering a vote, Members must anticipate how that vote will be played by the media.”

## **CONGRESSIONAL STAFF**

“It is a mistake to underestimate the importance of congressional staff in the legislative process. Because of Members’ hectic schedules, they rely on staff to help them evaluate legislation. Today’s staffers usually have a good appreciation of political processes, but their main strength is substantive technical knowledge.”

“Members of Congress vote several times every legislative day on diverse and complex issues. Usually they have more information than they can assimilate. It is then that decision-making becomes a very personal matter. When the voting clock is running down, a decision must be made. The representative knows that in our democracy he or she alone will be held accountable for it.”

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# ***UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF CONGRESSIONAL STAFF\****

## **FEDERAL CONGRESSIONAL STAFF**

Whether calling, writing, e-mailing or visiting a federal congressional office, it is important to understand the role of your Representative's or Senator's staff members. Most congressional offices will have a ***Legislative Assistant (LA) handling your content area of interest.*** Each Senator and Representative relies heavily on his or her staff to be knowledgeable and informed on the issues. Because the information and advice they provide is often effective in shaping the legislator's opinion on an issue, any time spent discussing your views with them will be a good investment.

In addition to the staff members in the legislator's personal office, there are ***Committee and Subcommittee Staff Members.*** Although a staff member usually has multiple subject areas of responsibility, for example, covering issues such as science, defense, budget, veterans' and the environment, ***a committee staff member is often able to specialize in a small number of areas and to acquire expertise in them.*** These staff members work for the legislator who chairs the committee or subcommittee or who serves as its ranking minority Member.

***Staff Members in Legislators' District Offices*** serve a different function. These staff members take care of the ***lawmaker's schedule, including appointments and personal appearances.***

They also serve ***as caseworkers to help resolve***

***the problems of the district's citizens*** as they relate to federal programs. For example, a district office caseworker may help find out why a social security recipient's check is late. Usually members of the personal district office staff are not involved in legislative issues.

## **EACH SENATOR AND REPRESENTATIVE**

### **RELIES HEAVILY ON HIS OR HER STAFF TO BE**

### **KNOWLEDGEABLE AND INFORMED**

### **ON THE ISSUES.**

## **STATE CONGRESSIONAL STAFF**

Aides are appointed by legislators to assist them in carrying out their duties. As with federal congressional staff, you should feel comfortable that in speaking to an aide, you are receiving the attention of the legislator. Often, developing a good working relationship with an aide can be a key factor in developing support for legislation.

It would be impossible to generalize the nature of state legislative staffs. In some states, legislators have staff members both in the State Capitol and their district offices. In others, there may be one staff person on the district level, and the legislator may actually take his or her own phone calls when in the State Capitol.

Sometimes several legislators share staff.

Commonly used titles of staff members include:

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\* This information was taken from the American Society of Landscape Architects ASLA website with permission [www.asla.org/govtaffairs/licensure/advocakit.html](http://www.asla.org/govtaffairs/licensure/advocakit.html)

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**Legislative Director, Legislative Assistant, or Legislative Coordinator:**

These individuals are the staff members who make recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. Some legislators may have staff members who focus on specific areas (health care, environmental matters, taxes, etc.).

**Press Secretary or Communications Director:**

These staff members build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the member, his/her constituency, and the general public.

**Appointment Secretary or Scheduler:**

These individuals are responsible for allocating a legislators' time among legislative responsibilities and constituent requests. He or she may also be responsible for arranging speaking dates, public appearances, visits to the district.

**Other Staff Titles:**

Other titles used in a legislative office may include: Caseworker, Executive Assistant, Legislative Correspondent, Executive Secretary, Office Manager, Staff Assistant and Receptionist.

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## National Child Abuse Coalition

**The key to making inroads to the legislatures, at federal, state, and local levels, is through the development of relationships**

Tom Birch is the legislative counsel for the *National Child Abuse Coalition*, a Washington D.C.-based organization. Originally having worked as a legislative counsel to members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, Mr. Birch has been working diligently for over 25 years in the area of legislative advocacy and topics of public policy, including the child welfare arena.

Despite the many challenges, Mr. Birch reports that he has persevered through the years because of his *eternal optimism*. He feels the biggest impact can be attained by focusing efforts on prevention.

Focusing on prevention efforts can “turn peoples’

heads” in discovering the relationship between early intervention and other ongoing social issues such as disabilities and crime.

Mr. Birch stated that the members of the police force make this connection readily as they witness the abused children in their community become involved in the criminal justice system and then often become abusers themselves, creating a generational problem.

In addressing the advocacy role that psychologists can play, Mr. Birch stated that the *development of relationships* is the key to making inroads to the legislatures, at federal, state, and local levels.

Phone interview with Tom Birch, National Child Abuse Coalition, June 21, 2006.

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## WRITING A LETTER OR SENDING E-MAIL\*

Due to security issues post-9/11 in local, state, and federal offices, it is best to contact your representatives via e-mail or FAX. These guidelines may prove helpful in improving the effectiveness of your correspondence:

The proper style for addressing legislative members is as follows:



Representative:  
The Honorable Jane Smith  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Senator:  
The Honorable John Jones  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Smith:

Dear Senator Jones:

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### BE . . .

#### DISCRIMINATING

Write only on the issues that are very important to you and avoid the risk of diluting your effectiveness by writing too often.

Always remember that a personally written e-mail is more highly regarded than form letters, but a form letter is better than no letter at all.

#### DIRECT

State the subject of your letter clearly, keep it brief, and address only one issue in each letter.

#### INFORMATIVE

State your own views, support them with your expert knowledge, and cite the bill number (House bill: H.R. ##### or Senate bill: S. ###) of relevant legislation, if appropriate.

#### CONSTRUCTIVE

Rely on the facts and avoid emotional arguments, threats of political influence, or demands.

#### POLITICAL

Explain the hometown relevance of the issue. If you are affiliated with an institution, consider using its stationery with permission.

#### CONCISE AND TO THE POINT

The best letter is well written and is no longer than one page.

#### INQUIRING

Ask for the legislator's view on the subject and how she or he intends to vote on relevant legislation. Expect a reply, even if it's only a form letter.

#### PERSONAL

Provide personal and local examples of the impact of the legislation. *This is the most important thing you can do*

#### AVAILABLE

Offer additional information if needed and make sure your legislator knows how to reach you.

#### APPRECIATIVE

Remember to say "thank you" when it is deserved. Follow the issue after you write and send a letter of appreciation and thanks if your legislator votes your way.

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\* This summary was extracted from the *Congressional Record* and reprinted with the permission of AARP/VOTE.

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**SAMPLE LETTER\***

[Address]

[Date]

The Honorable [Representative's Last Name]  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator [Last Name]:

I am writing to you as a constituent and a psychologist regarding the current work of the Committee on Health, Education, and Pensions for Early Head Start. More specifically, I am urging your support of language in the Manager's package allowing expansion of Early Head Start until all eligible preschool children in a state can be served.

Currently, only 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers nationally receive Early Head Start. The Senate must maintain its provision to increase the Early Head Start program's set-aside to 18 percent of total funds over 5 years so Early Head Start can serve more eligible infants and toddlers.

In addition, a conversion provision would allow Head Start programs to expand Early Head Start services to infants and toddlers once all eligible preschoolers in a state have been served. The Senate bill as it is currently written would take funds that go unused when no preschool-age children remain to be served and send the money to other states, potentially discouraging states from making their own investments. In my state, this would significantly impact Hispanic children and their families, many of whom have no other support during this critical learning period.

Early Head Start Works! The National Evaluation of Early Head Start – a rigorous, large-scale, random-assignment evaluation – concluded that Early Head Start makes a positive difference in areas associated with children's success in school, and family self-sufficiency.

I urge you to ask Chairman Enzi and Ranking Member Kennedy to include language in their Manager's package allowing expansion of Early Head Start when all eligible preschool children in a state have been served. Please contact me directly regarding this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue and I look forward to working with your office in the future.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]/[Your Title]

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\* Reproduced from the Zero to Three website ([www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)), Public Policy Initiatives, March 14, 2006.

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## ***MAKING A TELEPHONE CALL***

The guidelines for making an effective telephone call to a congressional office are similar to those for effective letter writing, with a few additions.

### **Federal Legislator: Washington Office**

U.S. Capitol Switchboard

(202) 224-3121

Give the name of your legislator, and ask to be connected with her or his office.

### **Federal Legislator: District Office**

Visit APA Public Policy, Take Action

<http://capwiz.com/apapolicy/home/>

### **For State and Local Legislators**

The **National Conference of State Legislators** has links to legislature home pages of each state <http://www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm> or

**Congress.Org** offers listings of state and local representatives by entering your home address.

<http://www.congress.org/congressorg/dbq/officials/?lvl=L>

If calling the office in Washington DC, first, ask to speak with the legislative assistant who handles the subject of your interest.

If the relevant staff member is not available, you can ask for a return call or leave a concise message on his or her voice mail, such as, “My name is Dr. Jan Jones and I am a professor of psychology at the University of Hometown. I am calling to ask for the Senator’s

support on...” Be prepared to give your address or telephone number and remember to jot down the name of the person with whom you spoke and the information given (i.e., you may want to repeat this information to confirm its accuracy).

In all cases, it is important to remember that the person you talk to may have just gotten off the telephone with another constituent who had a very different concern. Help to focus the listener by starting just as you would in a letter introducing yourself, and the reason that you are calling. Again, be prepared with facts, information, and local examples at your fingertips and clear idea of what you want your telephone call to achieve.

### **MAKING A TELEPHONE CALL**

#### **➤ PREPARE**

- **KNOW THE ISSUE**
- **KNOW THE GOAL**
- **KNOW THE FACTS**

#### **➤ PLACE THE CALL**

**IF CALLING WASHINGTON, ASK FOR THE LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT THAT COVERS YOUR ISSUE**

#### **➤ GIVE THE MESSAGE**

#### **➤ GET THE INFORMATION**

**CONFIRM THE LEGISLATOR’S SUPPORT OF THE GOAL**

#### **➤ PASS IT ALONG**

**TELL OTHERS, INCLUDING THE APA POLICY OFFICE**

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## ***ACTION ALERTS***

Action Alerts, found on the APA Government Relations Advocacy Network (<http://www.apa.org/ppo/ppan>) ask you to take immediate action by contacting your congressional delegation either by phone, e-mail or fax, to request support for a pending legislative initiative of interest.

These Action Alerts are only sent when it is clear that hearing from as many constituents as possible may make a difference. Most sites provide direct links to identifying your representatives, and provide the talking points you need to make the call or write the letter. In addition, these sites give you the opportunity to personalize the message.

### ***SAMPLE ACTION ALERT***

#### ***ACTION NEEDED TO PROTECT MEDICAID MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES***

**Calls Urgently Needed to Key House Members to Preserve Medicaid Mental Health Services**

**Please Call:** [Your Representative]

#### **Instructions**

**Can't call while online? Want to call later? Print this alert.**

**Call Here:** (202)222-1111  
Washington, D.C. Office of [Your Representative]

**Ask For:** Staff person handling budget and appropriations issues

**Talking Points:**

- 1) I am [your name], a psychologist and constituent calling from [town & state], to urge Representative [name] to vote against the Budget Reconciliation Bill (S. 1932), which would severely limit access to critically needed Medicaid mental health services.
- 2) Of particular concern, the bill would reduce Medicaid funding by \$45 billion over the next ten years and would allow states to increase cost-sharing for Medicaid services – even for beneficiaries with incomes below the poverty level – and to charge premiums for the first time.
- 3) Medicaid is our nation's lifeline for millions of vulnerable, low-income children and adults who are in need of mental health services. Medicaid offers such vital services as the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) program for children and Targeted Case Management (TCM) services for both children and adults.
- 4) I look forward to hearing how the Representative votes on this crucial legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

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## ***VISITING WITH YOUR REPRESENTATIVES***

**A CAREFULLY  
PLANNED  
FACE-TO-FACE  
VISIT WITH  
YOUR  
LEGISLATOR IS  
THE MOST  
EFFECTIVE  
MEANS FOR  
CONVEYING  
YOUR  
MESSAGE.**

A carefully planned face-to-face visit with your federal, state or local representatives, staffers or other officials is the most effective means for conveying your message. In the federal arena, APA Government Relations Staff is always willing to work with you to set up such a meeting if you are in Washington.

### **MAKE AN APPOINTMENT**

Begin by contacting the legislator's appointment secretary. State that you are a constituent in the legislator's district and identify the subject that you wish to discuss. If you are not a constituent, you may be discouraged from making an appointment, due to time constraints. If it is clear that the legislator is unable to meet with you, then a very good substitute is a meeting with the relevant legislative assistant (LA). Legislators have a demanding schedule. In fact, it is possible that you may meet the LA, even if your appointment was scheduled with the legislator.

If possible, learn as much as you can about the legislator's record as it relates to your issue.

### **BE PREPARED**

Have your information in a digestible, concise form, just as you would when writing a letter or making a telephone call. Know the opposing arguments as well as those in favor of your view. Take your cues on how to proceed from the policymaker. If he or she seems familiar with the issue, you can move right ahead. If not, take the opportunity to inform. Leave a brief page of bulleted talking points along with a business card.

### **BE ON TIME...**

But don't be surprised if your representative is not. Congressional schedules are hectic! Patience and flexibility is required!

### **DO YOUR HOMEWORK**

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## **ESTABLISH TIES**

Introduce yourself, state where you reside in the district and a little about your involvement (i.e., “I am a psychologist working in the Washington School District”). Establish your connection to the policy issue--why you are an expert.

However, don’t get bogged down in small talk. You will have precious few minutes so it is important to keep to the purpose of the meeting.

## **BE CONCISE**

Busy legislators and staff appreciate short meetings for which the purpose is clearly presented

## **BE PERSONAL**

Provide personal and local examples of the impact of the legislation. *This is extremely important.*

## **BE INQUIRING**

Ask your legislator to state his or her position on your issue. Know what you want in advance and ask for it. Be tolerant of differing views and keep the dialogue open.

## **BE RESPONSIVE**

Try to answer questions. When you can’t, offer to get back to your legislator with the information or let APA know to contact the person with additional information.

## **BE APPRECIATIVE**

Thank him or her for the time spent with you.

## **FOLLOW-UP**

Send a thank you note after your meeting, capitalizing on the opportunity to restate your points.

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## **SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER \***

[Address]

[Date]

The Honorable [Representative's Last Name]  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator [Last Name]:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to talk with you and [Staff Name] last Thursday regarding the Early Head Start committee meetings. I would again urge you to speak with Chairman Enzi and Ranking Member Kennedy to include language in their Manager's package allowing expansion of Early Head Start when all eligible preschool children in a state have been served

As I explained, currently, only 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers nationally receive Early Head Start. The Senate must maintain its provision to increase the Early Head Start program's set-aside to 18 percent of total funds over 5 years so Early Head Start can serve more eligible infants and toddlers.

A conversion provision would allow Head Start programs to expand Early Head Start services to infants and toddlers once all eligible preschoolers in a state have been served. The Senate bill as it is currently written would take funds that go unused when no preschool-age children remain to be served and send the money to other states. This loss of federal funds may discourage states from making their own investments in preschool ultimately to the disadvantage of our children.

Again, I urge you to ask Chairman Enzi and Ranking Member Kennedy to include language in their Manager's package allowing expansion of Early Head Start when all eligible preschool children in a state have been served. Please let me know if I can provide further information.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]  
[Your Title]

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\* Information taken from the Zero to Three website ([www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)), Public Policy Initiatives, March 14, 2006.

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## INVITING YOUR REPRESENTATIVES TO VISIT\*

**WOULD IT  
SURPRISE  
YOU TO  
KNOW THAT  
YOUR  
LEGISLATOR  
MIGHT BE  
INTERESTED IN  
VISITING  
YOUR  
JOB,  
PROGRAM  
OR RESEARCH  
SITE?**

Would it surprise you to know that your federal, state or local representatives, staffers or other officials might be interested in visiting your job, program or research site? Sometimes the most convincing case is the one seen first hand. If you are receiving federal funds or are a recipient of state funding, then arranging a visit for your Representative/Senator is a natural opportunity for you and your legislator. Such visits keep lawmakers in touch with the interests and needs of their constituents, inform them about less familiar subject areas, and provide you with an opportunity to strengthen your relationship with the legislator. Especially attractive to a Representative or Senator is the opportunity to meet a great number of concerned and involved constituents during a congressional “District Work Period” when Congress stands in recess.

*The initiative to arrange such a visit must come from you.*

### TIPS FOR ARRANGING A SUCCESSFUL SITE VISIT

Appearances or site visits by public officials are exciting, but they require a great deal of advance planning.

Here are a few tips:

- *Coordinate the visit with other local events*

For example, if there is to be parent-sponsored activity at your school request that an invitation be extended to your representative. In addition, it is not a bad idea to plan a small reception. Legislators like to meet with as many constituents as possible.

- *Arrange and coordinate the event with the staff scheduler from the legislator’s office.*

Send a written request with all the appropriated details (e.g., time, place, duration of the visit, number of attendees, purpose of the visit/event and other guests, activities planned).

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\* This section was adapted from *Make Your Voice Heard* with permission from AARP/VOTE.

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- ***Invite members of the local press to attend the visit.***

First, be sure that your legislator's press secretary is informed before members of the press are invited. If you are affiliated with an institution, you will want to contact the public relations office for assistance with the visit; and let APA's Public Affairs Office know about the event as well.

- ***Notify anyone who will be affected by the visit***

This includes colleagues and administrative leadership, well in advance, and again the day before the event.

- ***Provide the legislator's office with precise and detailed directions***

This includes designating a contact person who will be available as a liaison for the legislator.

- ***Meet the legislator before the event***

Allow time for introductions, and provide a briefing on the itinerary. Discuss the purpose of the visit, for example, to request additional Federal funds.

- ***Introduce your guest***

Give a brief explanation of why he or she is visiting and announce whether or not there will be a question and answer session.

- ***Follow-up on any commitments***

Contact the legislator with any additional information promised after the event. Coordinate with the legislator's press secretary on the details of a press release, if called for.

- ***Send a thank you note***

Send a note and include photographs taken during the event, as well as any press clippings or news coverage generated by the event.

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## Practical Suggestions for Advocacy

Some of the things that Tom Birch of the *National Child Abuse Coalition* states psychologists can do to advocate for policy include:

- Legislators are predisposed to believe psychologists from the start regarding the information and knowledge related to their profession. It is critical that such information be provided to legislators and the community proactively. ***Providing succinct, readable results of research efforts that can be easily understood by a lay person*** encourages interest and lends itself to application in the community as well as the legislative arena.
  - Psychologists working with children and families in the community should ***invite politicians to come and see the programs of which they are a part***. This can be accomplished through invitations to planned activities or as part of an “open house” specifically for legislative representatives. This is an opportunity for these individuals to become aware of the needs in the community and to see first hand the types of issues that psychologists face.
- Legislative representatives ***must*** hear from their constituents directly involved with the issues. Sharing information with people who are in positions of power can facilitate change. ***The squeaky wheel gets the grease***. And don’t forget to invite your local media!
- Psychologists can also make an impact by becoming politically involved.
    - This includes making a commitment to candidates who support children and families by ***contributing financially or contributing time to a candidate’s political campaign***.
    - ***Attending candidates’ public forums and asking questions*** relevant to child welfare forces these individuals to think about the subject and respond to the voters in their community.

Personal Communication with Tom Birch, National Child Abuse Coalition, June 21, 2006.

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## ***GRASSROOTS ACTIVITIES***

**At all levels of government, the single most important thing that you can do is**

### ***Build relationships***

**This includes not only federal, state and local representatives, but also their staff members who have a significant role in making recommendations. You can do this as an individual and as someone representing a group of stakeholders.**

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The most important thing that you can do is to *start talking*.

Call your representatives, introduce yourself and stay in touch.

*Become the source of psychological knowledge. It is a powerful position.*



Ways in which psychologists have interacted at the federal and state level have included:

- **Completing research on specific pieces of legislation to highlight where psychological knowledge is important and providing this information to legislators.**
- **Helping to draft legislation**
- **Testifying at committee hearings**
- **Providing resolutions/opinions to legislators**
- **Advocating with policy makers on behalf of pending legislation**
- **Commenting on proposed regulations that govern implementation of laws**
- **Providing information to the judicial system on specific cases relevant to the profession**

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Become *actively involved in an organization's* efforts to inform legislators and change policy.

- **Volunteer your time and expertise.**
- **Volunteer for positions that allow you to become a spokesperson with other stakeholders.**

For APA, this includes:

- *APA Government Relations and Public Policy Advocacy Network*

<http://www.apa.org/ppo/>

<http://www.apa.org/ppo/ppan>

- *APA Division 37: Child, Youth and Family Services:*

<http://www.apa.org/divisions/div37>

Other possibilities include:

- *Child Welfare League of America's Children's Monitor Online*

<http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/monitoronline.htm>

- *Every Child Matters Federal Children Watch*

<http://www.everychildmatters.org>

- *Zero to Three Policy Center*

<http://www.zerotothree.org/policy/>

- *Children's Defense Fund Action Council*

<http://www.cdfactioncouncil.org/>

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*At the state and local level*, speak with your colleagues and clients and identify opportunities to be heard.

- **Volunteer your time to speak with local groups, such as churches, schools, community centers or parent support groups.**
  - **Share your psychological knowledge**
  - **Ask for their support in contacting legislators with specific action items.**
- **Participate in state and local government**
  - **Vote in the PRIMARY elections for candidates who are supportive of social policy benefiting children and families**
  - **Donate time and money to the candidate of your choice**
  - **Network by attending fund-raising events for candidates**
  - **Become a candidate yourself for federal, state or local positions.**

Can't identify a personal cause to become involved with? Contact the APA Government Relations Office or the leadership of Division 37.

Also contact state-based organizations such as those found at:

- *Voices for America's Children:*

<http://www.voicesforamericaschildren.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Store/Members/StateMap.htm>

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**Take the lead** and organize efforts with your colleagues.

- **Provide legislative advocacy training to a group of colleagues—share this Advocacy Guide!**
- **Demonstrate unity and depth of support for your issue by forming a coalition of stakeholders and wage an organized advocacy campaign.**
- **Coordinate a letter writing campaign on an issue you feel strongly about.**
- **Coordinate a phone calling session to your legislators**
- **Coordinate a visit to your legislator’s office.**
- **Provide specific opportunities for action and encourage colleagues and friends to become active in the legislative process.**
- **Coordinate a site visit to your place of work for a federal, state or local representative.**  
*Invite the media.*