



# EARLY CHILDHOOD **ADVOCACY TOOLKIT**



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**What comes to mind when you hear the word “advocacy?” A lobbyist in Washington, DC? A political rally with thousands of participants? Or perhaps a state senator speaking on the Senate floor about the concerns of her community? These are all examples of advocacy, as are other types of actions that most of us take every day.**

**You are an advocate if you have ever:**

- Helped a family receive needed services.
- Stood up for someone who was being treated unfairly.
- Attended a parent-teacher conference at your child’s school.
- Participated in a city council meeting.

This toolkit is designed to prepare you to advocate successfully for public policies that benefit young children and their families.

**Advocacy** is building support for an issue among audiences, such as the general public, elected officials, the media and key opinion leaders. Activities like educating audiences about a topic, sharing illustrative stories or working on a solution to a problem are considered advocacy. Individuals can always contact their elected officials as constituents. State and federal governments do not regulate the participation of the public at large in advocacy or lobbying activities. Remember to use your personal email and telephone when contacting policymakers.

**Lobbying** is communicating with elected officials to influence their actions regarding a specific piece of legislation. Many nonprofits can lobby legally as long as they do not exceed restrictions on how time and resources are expended based on federal tax laws. An organization should seek expert legal and tax advice before it engages in lobbying activities.

**Advocacy activities that are not lobbying:**

- Invite a legislator to visit your program and hear about the work being done.
- Provide a policymaker with information or educational materials on a topic.
- Talk with the media about a specific social issue.
- Track legislative positions and voting records.

Learn more about permissible activities during an election in the “Voting and Elections” section.

Consult the following resources for additional information on advocacy guidelines for nonprofit organizations:

- Alliance for Justice ([www.afj.org/](http://www.afj.org/))
- Council for Non-Profits ([www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy](http://www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy))
- Forefront (<https://myforefront.org/>)

**Why Should You Advocate?** One goal of early childhood advocacy is to improve the lives of children and families by influencing the opinions and activities of legislators and policymakers. To carry out their responsibilities, public officials require and welcome the advice that well-informed people like you provide.

The Illinois Policy Team at Start Early can help you:

- Become familiar with the basics of advocacy
- Develop your message
- Invite your elected officials to visit your program

**Please feel free to contact us by email at [advocacy@startearly.org](mailto:advocacy@startearly.org).**



# TYPES OF ADVOCACY



## CASE ADVOCACY:

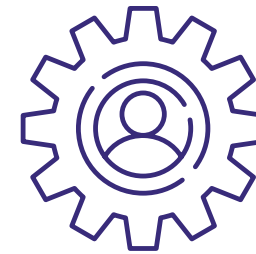
Intervening to address an individual child's or family's problem. By being aware of and documenting service-delivery problems, providers can share important information and collect examples that help identify policy issues.

### Strategies

- Research the rules or eligibility requirements of a particular program or policy.
- Document the problem, its history and whether others have had similar difficulties.
- Meet with local agency staff and/or affected family to discuss a problem.
- File an appeal if services are denied.

### Example

Tonya, a caseworker, has been working with the Ferguson family for several years. During a routine meeting, she noticed that Ms. Ferguson brought along her youngest son, 4-year-old Zachary. Ms. Ferguson explained that Zachary was with her, and not at preschool, because his child care subsidy lapsed recently when his eligibility information was not received in time. In Tonya's experience, Ms. Ferguson was incredibly diligent and thorough about her eligibility paperwork. Knowing how important it was for Zachary to have consistent learning experiences, Tonya called the family's child care caseworker and learned that Ms. Ferguson's paperwork had been received, but the information had not been communicated to Ms. Ferguson or the preschool director. The child care caseworker called the preschool director to reinstate the subsidy for Zachary. He went back to preschool the next day.



## ADMINISTRATIVE ADVOCACY:

Creating new policies, revising guidelines and resolving programmatic problems through activities directed at administrative and governmental agencies with the authority and discretion to change rules and regulations. Many decisions are made informally, so interacting with the managing entity—rather than working through the legislature—can be the most effective way to make a positive change.

### Strategies

- Develop ongoing relationships with advocates and agency staff to influence decision-making.
- Participate in forums or public meetings where decisions are made.
- Provide reliable information about the impact of policy decisions in your community, agency or program to build your credibility.

### Example

Sam, the local director of a home visiting program, is frustrated because the state agency that provides funding has told them that the program must use the approved developmental screening instrument. They and staff have found that another comparable instrument that includes a more parent-focused process is extremely useful in helping to engage parents in conversations about their child's development. Sam's staff has been using both screenings to satisfy the funder's requirement as well as have the desired outcome with families. During a site review, Sam and the department liaison discuss the issue in-depth, and Sam shows the liaison evidence of improved parent outcomes that they believe are linked to their preferred screening tool. After the site review, Sam sends a follow-up email to the liaison and the supervisor, asking them to reconsider their policy. After more investigation, the department amends its rule to allow programs greater flexibility in choosing from a list of approved screening tools so that programs decide which tool better fits their local needs.







### LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY:

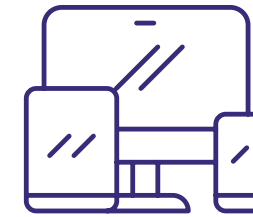
Working with elected officials to strengthen the early care and education system. This can be done through educating them on policies or informing them on the impact programs are having in their home district. Advocates can educate decision-makers and suggest policies that would benefit their community. Legislative advocacy activities can also include lobbying on specific bills or requested funding levels.

#### Strategies

- Communicate with legislators and staff through letters, emails, phone calls or personal visits.
- Testify before relevant legislative committees.
- Work with legislators to compel agency administrators to adopt your proposal.
- Meet with staff of the governor's office and the legislature to draw attention to your issue.
- Invite legislators to visit your program and see how policies affect people in your community.

#### Example

Mary was experiencing severe postpartum depression. She had health insurance and access to great prenatal care, yet none of her doctors ever asked her how she was feeling. Within weeks of having her baby, she was admitted to a psychiatric unit in the local hospital for treatment of postpartum depression. After recovering, Mary wanted to help other women who might be dealing with the same diagnosis. She called her state senator and together they drafted legislation that would require doctors to screen birthing parents for postpartum depression and provide birthing parents and their families with information about perinatal mood disorders. Mary testified before a legislative committee and lobbied lawmakers in Springfield. Over the next several months, Mary and other advocates worked to pass the bill.



### MEDIA ADVOCACY:

Using media to increase public awareness and influence broader public debate about early childhood issues. Keeping your issue in the news creates public recognition and support, thereby increasing its practical and political importance.

#### Strategies

- Express your point of view through letters to the editor.
- Contact local reporters when your organization has news to share (e.g., increase/decrease in state funding or human-interest story about a family).
- Meet with the editorial boards of newspapers.
- Share pertinent local media coverage with elected officials from your community.
- Invite media to join legislators to visit your program and see how policies affect people in your community.

#### Example

Anna reads a story in her local newspaper about the number of children under age 1 who enter the child welfare system because of abuse or neglect. Anna, the director of a home visiting program at the county health department, writes a letter to the editor, detailing community resources available through her agency to help coach new parents through the exhausting, overwhelming and exhilarating first weeks and months of their child's life. Anna includes outcomes evidence from her program and national statistics on how home visiting programs reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect.





# FRAME YOUR MESSAGE

Many of our key audiences (legislators, legislative aides, agency staff, reporters, business and civic leaders) often have little time to discuss complex issues. Given these time constraints, it is imperative to develop a succinct message about early childhood issues that will capture the audience's interest. Advocates must also communicate a clear and concise message in different formats: letters, emails, social media posts, speeches and meetings with public officials.

## The message needs to:

- 1 **Engage Your Audience**
- 2 **State the Problem**
- 3 **Inform About Solutions**
- 4 **Include a Call to Action**

The EPIC format, trademarked by the grassroots advocacy organization RESULTS ([www.results.org](http://www.results.org)), is a useful way to create a concise but powerful statement.



The following chart shows how you can frame your message for different audiences. If, for example, you are trying to develop support for a bill that provides capital funds to build new early childhood facilities, you would want to tailor your message to lawmakers, practitioners and the business community. Here is how you would use the EPIC approach to speak to these audiences.



	LAWMAKERS	EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS	BUSINESS COMMUNITY
ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE			
Identify the audience you are trying to influence. Choose information and language that will resonate with the audience and help it understand the issues.	"I am your constituent and am concerned with early childhood issues in my community."	"As an early childhood professional, you are likely concerned about providing the best learning environment for children in your community as well as a stimulating work environment for your fellow employees."	"Early childhood programs are proven to prepare children for school and life. High-quality early childhood programs are necessary for a strong future workforce."
STATE THE PROBLEM			
Clearly and concisely define the problem. Choose the most compelling component of the issue for each audience. Think about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>What</b> is the problem?</li><li>• <b>Who</b> is impacted by the issue?</li><li>• <b>Why</b> does the issue need to be addressed at this time?</li><li>• <b>Where</b> is the problem greatest?</li><li>• <b>When</b> is intervention needed before there are negative consequences?</li><li>• <b>How</b> are children, families and the community being impacted?</li><li>• <b>What</b> local data can you access to emphasize how the problem is affecting the community?</li></ul>	"Our community has grown tremendously in the past several years. Centers regularly have to turn away children who could benefit from their programs because they don't have enough classroom space for them. There is a vacant building next to a center where services could be expanded to serve many more families. However, current funding will not cover the renovation costs."	"Our community has grown tremendously in the past several years, and more parents are seeking early childhood programs for their children. Your program has had to turn away many children because there is not enough classroom space. You may want to expand your facility, but your current funding will not cover the costs."	"Our community has grown tremendously in the past several years, and more parents are seeking early childhood programs for their children. But programs regularly have to turn away children because there is not enough classroom space. "
INFORM ABOUT SOLUTIONS			
Be prepared to suggest and discuss practical solutions. Consider your specific recommendations, the evidence you have to support them and how these solutions might be funded.	"The capital bill includes funding for early childhood facilities. If the bill is approved, it would allow the center to apply for at least a portion of the cost of a renovation project and would go far in helping it reach its goal of serving many more children in our community."	"The state legislature is considering a capital bill that includes funding for early childhood facilities. If the bill is approved, it would allow programs like yours to apply for funding to build or renovate facilities and help them serve many more children in the community."	"The state legislature is considering a capital bill that includes funding for early childhood facilities. If the bill is approved, it would allow programs to apply for funding to build or renovate facilities and help them serve many more children in the community."
CALL TO ACTION			
The call to action required will vary according to the audience and the problem at hand, but make sure to clearly define the "ask." The action requested should be specific and give your audience an immediate way to get involved.	"Would you support the capital bill that includes early childhood facilities funding? Would you ask your legislative leaders to also support this initiative?"	"Would you call your legislators and ask them to support the capital bill that includes early childhood facilities funding?"	"Would you call your legislators and ask them to support the capital bill that includes early childhood facilities funding?"

# COMMUNICATE WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Developing personal, ongoing relationships with elected officials is the most effective way to secure their support on children's issues. You can build these relationships through phone calls, letters, emails, in-person meetings and scheduled program tours.

## General Tips

As you build these strong, personal relationships, it is important to remember that:

- Policymakers care about issues that affect their community, and they respond to concise, persuasive arguments that are easily understood and communicated.
- Letters, emails and phone calls are effective ways to communicate. Five or six letters or phone calls on a specific issue may encourage the elected official to pay closer attention to that issue. Personalized letters are always most effective.
- You likely know much more about children's issues than your elected official. Leverage this knowledge to educate and build a relationship with your elected official so you are seen as a resource.
- Sharing stories about children and their families and how they are impacted by an issue is a very effective way to build support for your position.
- Legislators' staff members are wonderful resources. Developing a good relationship with legislative staff can lead to direct contact with a legislator over time.

## Phone Calls, Letters and Emails

Correspondence from constituents reminds elected officials that the public is tracking specific issues, legislation and their voting records. Whenever communicating with legislators through a phone call, letter or email, remember to:

- Identify yourself as a constituent.
- Keep communication brief and to the point.
- When addressing a specific piece of legislation, refer to the bill number.
- Include factual and, if possible, local information and examples that support your viewpoint.
- Stay on topic—discuss one issue per written communication or conversation.
- Include a call to action, specifying what you want the lawmaker to do.

If making a phone call, practice your remarks. The more you rehearse, the more comfortable you will be delivering your message when it counts. Practice with another person to identify any areas where your message isn't clear or effective.

Written correspondence to US representatives and senators takes an extended period of time to reach them because all mail is carefully screened for safety.

You can follow elected officials on social media to stay up to date with the issues and legislation they are sponsoring.

*See the Resources section for samples of a phone call script, letter and email.*

## Social Media

Corresponding with your elected officials via social media is a quick, public way to raise awareness for your issue and is another way to build your relationship with those who represent you in government. When reaching out via social media, it is important to:

- Be clear and concise in your messaging.
- Be professional.
- Tag your lawmakers.
- Include relevant hashtags.
- Refer them to credible information that supports the point you are trying to make.
- Use images when possible, as they grab attention.
- If you are addressing a certain piece of legislation, be sure to include the bill number in your post.
- Be sure to include a call to action—what is it you want your legislator to do.

## In-Person Meeting With Your Elected Officials

Legislators want to be responsive to their constituents and their needs and will spend time with visitors when possible.

## Scheduling a Visit

- Schedule an appointment with policymakers in advance of your visit.
- Have several dates and times available for a face-to-face meeting. When calling to make an appointment with a member of Congress, ask for the scheduler, not the legislator. If the scheduler is not available, leave a message and follow up with another phone call.
- Let the scheduler know what issue you want to discuss with the legislator.
- If your elected official won't be available during your visit, ask to meet with a staff person knowledgeable about your issue.
- Find out how much time you will have with the policymaker.
- After making an appointment, leave your name and contact information with the scheduler as well as the names of any relevant organizations you are affiliated with.
- Consider inviting others from the community who might be influential with your lawmaker when scheduling an appointment.





### Meeting With Your Elected Officials

- Dress professionally.
- Practice your talking points.
- Look for common ground and compliment the official for past support if applicable.
- Allow the elected official time to ask questions and share observations or opinions.
- Anticipate opposing arguments. Be prepared to defend your perspective and stay focused on suggestions for constructive solutions.
- Ask elected officials what it would take for them to change their minds. Several communications may be necessary to effectively persuade a policymaker.
- Be friendly, firm and positive in your messaging even if your legislator does not share your perspective. A rational, balanced conversation will keep the official's door open to future contact.
- Bring informational materials such as fact sheets, articles or research studies to leave with the legislator and staff. When possible, use local data. For example, cite how many children under 5 live in the legislator's district and how many early childhood slots are available.
- Remember that you are an authority with content knowledge and expertise to share.
- Include a call to action. Let the legislators know what you want them to do: vote for a bill, talk with colleagues, sponsor legislation, etc.
- Offer to provide a relevant follow-up contact or materials after the meeting.
- Take notes, particularly if further contact is expected.
- Thank your legislators or their staff members for the time they've spent and any supportive actions they will take.

### After the Meeting

- Follow up with an email thanking the legislators or staff persons for their time and reminding them of any action commitments they made.
- Do not send photocopied letters to legislators. It is better to send brief personalized letters than to send letters that have clearly been duplicated.
- Let them know what follow-up action they can expect from you if you offered to provide their office with further information.
- Talk with other advocates about the meeting and strategize next steps.



### Invite Elected Officials to Visit Your Program

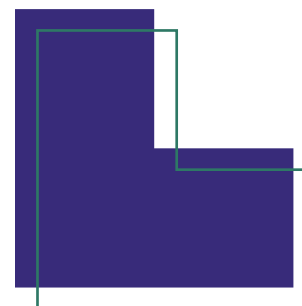
The visual impact of showing policymakers firsthand where children play and learn is worth a thousand words. Site visits give elected officials the opportunity to connect the policies they make with real children and providers in their districts. Site visits build lasting relationships and impressions.

- Find out when your state or federal legislators will be in your area. Congressional calendars can be found at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov). In addition to recesses, members of Congress may also be home on weekends or holidays. Session calendars for the Illinois General Assembly can be found at [www.ilga.gov](http://www.ilga.gov).
- Invite your legislators. Remember to give sufficient advance notice if there is a specific occasion when you would like them to visit.
- Invite collaborative organizations to the site visit to show elected officials how services for young children are coordinated.
- Confirm the date and time of the visit one week in advance. Ask if others will be accompanying the legislator and let them know if the local media will be present.
- Inform parents and staff that the legislator will be visiting and assure them that they and the children do not need to do anything different or special. Invite them to participate if they wish.
- Invite the local media to attend, or post photos of the event over social media. Make sure to get parental permission for children's photographs or names to be used in both stories and social media.



### On the Day of the Visit

- Be available to welcome and introduce your legislator to children, staff, parents and other guests.
- Use the opportunity to inform your official about important issues affecting young children and their families in the district.
- Showcase an activity that demonstrates a strong age-appropriate learning environment as a way of informing the official about the importance of your work with young children.
- Encourage your official to participate in an activity.
- Take photos to use for your program's newsletter and share over your own social media accounts as well as your legislator's social media accounts.
- Share news of the visit with your community partners.
- Maintain the relationship with a follow-up thank you note and further communication when you have specific information about early childhood issues to share.
- Add the official's name and address to your mailing list to maintain contact and provide updates.





# UNITED STATES CONGRESS

The US Congress is the nation's legislative body in Washington, DC made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Senate is made up of 100 senators, two from each state, who are elected for six-year terms. Elections occur on a rotating basis; about one-third of the Senate is up for re-election every two years. The 435 members of the House of Representatives are each elected for two years from districts within each state determined by population. Each chamber of Congress is divided into committees that focus on specific legislative areas. Committee members are generally the first to hear and work on bills.

## Contacting Your Federal Elected Officials

Use the links on our Advocacy in Action page to look up your elected officials. The US Capitol switchboard at 202.224.3121 can transfer calls to the appropriate legislator's office.

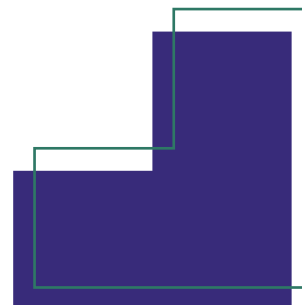
It can be difficult to contact federal representatives directly. When you call their offices, you will most likely speak to a staff member. You can ask for the legislative aide who handles the issue you are calling about or leave a message about your opinions on legislation with the person who answers the phone. Federal legislators have staff members who generally take care of the day-to-day policy issues, briefing them before important debates and votes.

Senators and representatives are usually available in their district offices during congressional breaks. You can schedule meetings with them or invite them to local programs or events by contacting the district office and speaking to the scheduler. They may also hold town hall meetings or appear at public events where you can communicate directly with them.



If you are in Washington, DC, you can visit your elected officials in their offices. This can be a great way to build relationships and to advocate for issues directly. Most legislators offer weekly constituent events, open to all visitors from their home district. Also, staff members are usually available to give tours and answer questions whenever the office is open. Call the office before your visit for more details. For further tips on visiting your representative, see page 12.

For more information about bills being considered by either chamber of Congress, voting records, or committees, go to [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov), [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov), or [www.thomas.gov](http://www.thomas.gov).



# HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

## Legislation is introduced

by a senator or representative in their chamber and given a reference number.

## The bill is then passed on

to the relevant committee or committees within that chamber, depending on the topic of the legislation.

## The committees hold hearings

and assign to subcommittees if necessary.

## The committee(s) discuss the bill

and debates potential changes.

## The committee(s) votes on the bill,

and if passed by majority vote it then moves to the entire chamber.

## The bill is heard

and debated in the chamber and may be put to a vote.

## Once the bill has passed a majority vote

in both chambers, it is passed onto the executive office to be signed into law by the governor or president.

## Federal Legislation

• Bills with similar content are developed in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Differences between the two bills are then reconciled by a Conference Committee. The reconciled version of the bill requires the approval of the House and Senate.

• The president can either sign the bill, actively veto it or decide not to act. If the president does not act in 10 days and Congress is still in session, the bill automatically becomes law. If Congress adjourns before 10 days and the president has not signed the bill, it is a "pocket veto."



# LOBBY DURING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Thousands of bills are introduced at the state and federal levels each year; most never become laws. In many instances, a bill's fate hinges on a critical mass of support or opposition from unions, chambers of commerce, nonprofit advocacy organizations and grassroots organizations, among others. By voicing support to policymakers for bills related to early childhood issues, you can play a major role in the policymaking process by helping to move bills forward and expand awareness of the issues.

There are several opportunities to influence decision-makers during the legislative process.

**Even if there is not a specific bill to discuss**, you should talk to legislators about the importance of early childhood investments in your community, offer to be a source of information on early childhood issues, and ask your legislator to support the funding and policies needed for high-quality programs.

**When a bill is introduced**, write and call your elected officials. This lets them know that this issue is important to their constituents. Ask your representative or senator to speak with members of the relevant committees working on the bill.

At the state level, you may have the opportunity to **testify before the relevant legislative committee** responsible for the bill in question. You can also submit written testimony or file a witness slip. At the federal level, testifying is generally not open to the public. However, it is effective to contact the committee members regarding a bill. If your legislator is on the relevant committee, contact them prior to a committee vote. If your legislator is not on the committee, ask them to speak to the committee chair.

**If a bill is passes out of committee** and is read, discussed and amended on the floor of the initiating chamber, you have the opportunity to expand your outreach to your legislator via telephone, letter or email. Should the bill pass through the chamber, you will have an opportunity to repeat these actions as the bill moves through the second chamber.

**As the bill moves forward in the second chamber**, extend your lobbying activities to include the governor's or president's office. Executive support can make or break a bill, and overriding a veto is not easy at the state or federal level.

## Maximize Your Impact

At each step in the process, ask your colleagues and friends to participate as well. Give them basic information about the bill and contact information for their legislators. The impact supporters or opponents have depends, in part, on the number of people who participate.

# WORK WITH THE MEDIA

The press is a powerful tool for shaping public opinion. Newspapers, radio shows, websites and TV news programs are looking for stories on relevant topics that have broad public appeal. Citizens can write letters to the editor, call talk shows and suggest topics to reporters to stimulate interest in early childhood issues.

## Write Letters to the Editor

- Letters are most effective when they are in response to a published article. Include the article name and publication date in your letter. Send your letter within 24 hours of the publication date to have a better chance of getting it published.
- Be concise. Shorter letters, generally around 200 words, are more likely to be printed.
- Use clear language that will resonate with the average person.
- Make the first line of the letter a strong statement to draw the reader in.
- Keep it relevant and timely by mentioning issues currently in the news.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms associated specifically with your program.
- Be accurate and avoid personal attacks.
- Close your letter with the thought you want readers to remember.
- Find the letter-writing guidelines of your local newspaper (generally on the editorial page or on the website). Adhere to the word limit and include your name, address and phone number.



## Tips for Early Childhood Programs

### General Tips

- Get your stories ready. Use real-life stories to demonstrate why your program is important and how it affects children and families.
- Build media relationships. Get to know reporters and local radio-show hosts to build interest in early childhood issues.
- Invite reporters to visit your organization to see firsthand the positive impact your program has on young children.
- Identify spokespeople. One or two staff or board members should be able to represent your organization and your messages. You may want to identify a few families who illustrate success stories and are comfortable talking to the media.



### Contact the Media

- If you have news to share, write a press release that incorporates your key messages.
- Do your homework. Read your local newspapers, watch local TV news programs and listen to local radio news shows. Make a list of the names of reporters who cover education and state government, and get their contact information.
- Do you have existing relationships with reporters? Contact them first to see if they are interested in your story.
- When you call or email a reporter, keep your pitch short and to the point.

### Media Interviews

- Make sure your spokespeople are prepared with unified key message points.
- Arrange to have photo opportunities that show the positive aspects of your program.
- Know your stats. Well-used, easy-to-understand numbers can make a strong case for early childhood programs and spending to support those programs.
- Be understandable. Avoid jargon that is specific to your program. Speak in terms that the general public will understand.
- Keep to the facts. Never make up or exaggerate data or stories.
- Be confident during the interview. You are the expert on your program and the benefits of early childhood services in your community.

For more media relations tips, City Bureau ([www.citybureau.org](http://www.citybureau.org)) and Public Narrative ([www.publicnarrative.org](http://www.publicnarrative.org)) are great resources..

# USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO DRIVE AWARENESS

### Become a virtual advocate:

Social media provides an easy, quick and public way to drive awareness for early learning and engage with your community, legislators and more. By using platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram you can show your support and be a virtual advocate.

### General Guidelines:

- Be clear and concise in your messaging—make those characters count.
- Tag organizations, individuals and lawmakers you are trying to reach.
- Include relevant hashtags (do a quick search to make sure your hashtag is appropriate).
- Include credible information that supports your cause when you can.
- Use images when possible.
- Include a call to action in your posts.
- Share and retweet posts that support your cause to help spread the word.
- Share when you've had a successful site visit with your representative. Post about the passage of important legislation that supports early childhood education. Reach out to your followers and mobilize them contact their lawmakers. Promote an upcoming event and let your followers know how they can get involved. You can use your virtual voice to provide updates, drum up support, share success stories and much more!

### Connect with Start Early

Facebook [www.facebook.com/startearlyorg](http://www.facebook.com/startearlyorg)  
 Twitter [www.twitter.com/startearlyorg](http://www.twitter.com/startearlyorg)  
 Instagram [www.instagram.com/startearlyorg/](http://www.instagram.com/startearlyorg/)  
 YouTube [www.youtube.com/user/startearly](http://www.youtube.com/user/startearly)

### Here is a selection of sample tweets to help get you started:

[@SenatorTwitterHandle] I urge you to support investments in quality #ECE. Children, families & communities need these services #AdvocateECE

[@RepresentativeTwitterHandle] children & families need your support—vote in favor of [bill number] to fund critical #earlylearning services!

We need quality #earlylearning for all children! #AdvocateECE to support children, families & communities @StartEarlyorg

Quality #homevisiting is proven to improve the lives young children & families—these #earlylearning services need our support! #AdvocateECE

Thank you [@RepresentativeTwitterHandle] for visiting our program to see quality #ECE in action! We hope you will continue to #AdvocateECE

Join me in urging investment in #earlylearning—I've seen firsthand how these services improve the lives of children and families! @StartEarlyorg

It's important to me that my child receives quality #earlylearning—together we can make that possible for every child #AdvocateECE @StartEarlyorg

As an #earlylearning provider, I urge legislators to support essential #ECE services for children & families #AdvocateECE @StartEarlyorg





# VOTING AND ELECTIONS

To make early childhood issues and programs a top priority on the legislative agenda, we must raise the profile of early childhood in elections, learn candidates' positions and most importantly, vote on Election Day. In the months leading up to voting, elected officials and candidates are generally accessible throughout their districts at local events. These events are opportunities to talk publicly about the importance of early childhood issues and to find out about an official's or candidate's support for them.

While individual citizens have the right to participate in political campaigns and vote, laws limit the participation of nonprofit organizations in electoral activities.

## Elections

State and federal elections take place every even-numbered year. Federal elections held during nonpresidential election years are known as midterm elections. There are two main dates to keep in mind each election year: the date of the primary election and the date of the general election.

The Illinois primary election takes place on the first Tuesday in February during each election cycle. The primary election reduces the field of candidates to one per political party in preparation for the general election.

The general election takes place on the first Tuesday in November after the first Monday of the month. The general election is when voters select which candidate will represent them in public office at the state and federal levels.



## What are the voter registration requirements?

- Must be a US citizen.
- Must be at least 18 years old by Election Day.
- Must have been a resident of the precinct at least 30 days prior to Election Day.

## What forms of identification are needed to register to vote?

- Two forms of identification with at least one showing a current residence address (when registering in person).
- When registering by mail, one form of identification is needed.

## Do I ever have to reregister to vote?

- Only if you move, legally change your name or move to another state.

## When can I register to vote?

- Voter registration takes place year-round.
- In Illinois, registration must take place at least 27 days before Election Day, however, grace-period registration is available after that deadline, including on election day. Grace-period registration is only available in-person at sites authorized by each election authority.

## Where can I register to vote?

- Online
- Via mail
  - Download voter registration applications in English and Spanish at [www.elections.il.gov/VotingInformation/Register.aspx](http://www.elections.il.gov/VotingInformation/Register.aspx).
  - Applications must be postmarked prior to the close of registration.
- Any municipal, county, state, or other government office
- At the office of any elected official
- Schools
- Public libraries
- Military recruitment offices
- Driver's license facilities

## When can I consider myself officially registered to vote?

- When you receive your voter ID card in the mail.
- You can verify your registration status online at the Illinois State Board of Elections, [www.elections.il.gov/VotingInformation/Register.aspx](http://www.elections.il.gov/VotingInformation/Register.aspx).
- If you have not received a voter ID card within three weeks after registering, call the election office.

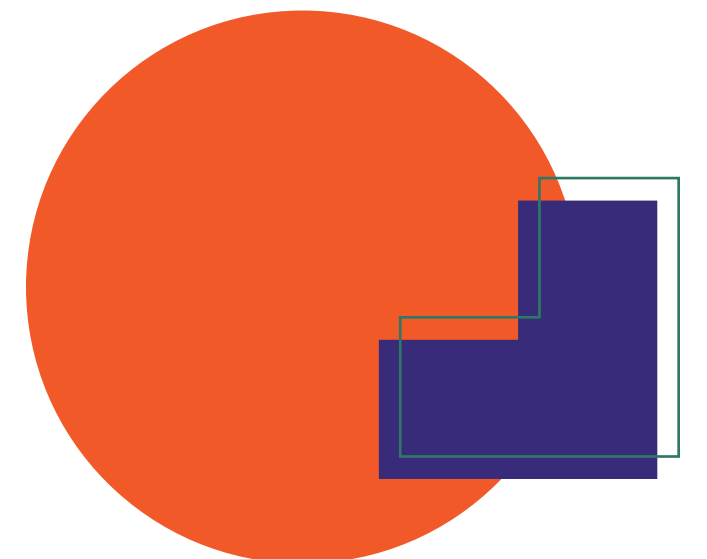
## How can I vote absentee?

- You must vote in person the first time you vote.

In Illinois, for more information on topics like voter registration, voter rights and absentee voting, visit the Illinois State Board of Elections, [www.elections.state.il.us](http://www.elections.state.il.us), or visit the US Election Assistance Commission website, <https://www.eac.gov/voters/election-day-contact-information>, to find your state voting authority.

## Permissible Election Activities for 501(c)(3) Organizations

All 501(c)(3) public charity organizations are forbidden from engaging in any political activity in support of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. However, 501(c)(3) public charity organizations can engage in nonpartisan voter-education activity and in a limited amount of lobbying. Read more from the Alliance for Justice at [www.afj.org/](http://www.afj.org/) or from the Council of Nonprofits at [www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy](http://www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy).





Illinois General Assembly

The Illinois General Assembly is the state’s legislative body, composed of a 59-member Senate and a 118-member House of Representatives. It is charged with enacting, amending or repealing laws; passing resolutions; adopting appropriation bills; and conducting inquiries on proposed legislation.

The General Assembly normally convenes on the second Wednesday in January every year and adjourns at the end of May, although this calendar can be shortened or extended depending on the legislative needs in a given year. In the fall, it reconvenes for two weeks for a veto session.

Legislators work in committees on specific subjects, such as education, human services or health. Most of the detailed work on bills is done in committees before they move to the chamber floor for discussion and voting.

Contacting Your State Elected Officials

Look up your Illinois elected officials by address using the links on our Advocacy in Action page. There you will find addresses and phone numbers for your state legislators’ Springfield and district offices.

The General Assembly website (www.ilga.gov) lists all senators and representatives, their district offices and Statehouse contact information. The site also provides legislative calendars, allows a user to search for bills and track their progress, and lists all Senate and House committees.

Illinois Legislation

- A bill must pass one chamber before being passed onto the next chamber. If a bill is amended (changed) in the second chamber, the changes require the approval of the first chamber.
- Testimony from the public is heard during the committee hearings. Speaking in person or submitting written testimony is a great way to make your voice heard.
- After a bill is approved by both chambers, the legislature has 30 calendar days to send the bill to the governor for their signature, who then has 60 calendar days to sign or veto the bill. If they do not act within that time, the bill automatically becomes a law.

- A. Sample Legislator Phone Call and Letter/Email
- B. Glossary of Legislative Terms
- C. Key Illinois Organizations
- D. Key National Child and Family Organizations
- E. Related Government Agencies

A. Sample Legislator Phone Call and Letter/Email

Phone Script

- Hello, I am (your name), a constituent in Representative/Senator (your legislator’s name)’s district.
- I am calling to speak with Representative/Senator \_\_\_\_ about early childhood education and programs in our community.
- I ask that you support (bill name) to increase funding for high-quality early learning programs.
- The first five years are the most important of a child’s development. Economists, business leaders and scientific researchers agree that high-quality early childhood services are among the smartest public investments we can make.
- Early childhood programs provide the best and most cost-effective way to give children furthest from opportunity the chance to succeed in school and life.
- I ask that you vote in support of legislation that increases funds for needed early childhood programs in your legislative district. These funds will greatly impact the lives of young children and families in our community.
- Thank you for your time.

Letter/Email

Dear Representative/Senator \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to you about the importance of early childhood programs in our community. As a constituent in your district, I ask that you support (bill name) to increase funding for high-quality early learning programs in our community.

Research tells us that children who participate in high-quality early learning have better language, math and social skills than their peers who missed this opportunity. They are also more likely to graduate from high school, and less likely to become involved in crime.

The first five years are the most important of a child’s development. Economists, business leaders and scientific researchers agree that high-quality early childhood services are among the smartest public investments we can make. Early childhood programs provide the best and most cost-effective way to give children furthest from opportunity the chance to succeed in school.

My early learning center, (name of center), has a waiting list of (XX) children, and without additional funds I am unable to serve them. Please vote in support of (bill number) so that all the children in our community will be prepared to enter school ready to learn.

Thank you for your hard work.



B. Glossary of Legislative Terms

**ADOPTION**

Approval or acceptance of amendments, resolutions or laws.

**AMENDMENT**

Proposal to change the language of a bill or a law and offered in committee or on the floor of the House or Senate.

**APPROPRIATION**

Allows spending for specified purposes.

**APPROPRIATIONS, CONTINUING**

Stopgap measures that fund programs and agencies between the beginning of the fiscal year (July 1 for Illinois state government and October 1 for the federal government) and the date on which the governor or president signs the regular appropriations bill into law. In the absence of continuing appropriations, the government would shut down because there would be no authority to spend money without a funding bill in place.

**APPROPRIATIONS, REGULAR**

Measures that fund agencies or programs for a full year.

**APPROPRIATIONS, SUPPLEMENTAL**

Spending that is approved outside the normal annual appropriations process either to pay for unanticipated or extraordinary expenditures or to fund activities authorized too late for normal budgetary deadlines. Supplemental appropriations bills are usually considered midyear, after the approval of the regular appropriations bills.

**AUTHORIZATION**

Provision in law that establishes an agency or program and allows for spending for that agency or program.

**BALANCED BUDGET**

A budget in which revenues equal spending.

**BILL**

The main vehicle employed by members of the General Assembly or Congress for introducing their proposals.

**BUDGET DEFICIT**

The amount by which spending exceeds revenues.

**CAUCUS**

A closed meeting of legislators of one party, or any group of legislators who meet formally because of their interest in specific issues.

**CHAIR**

Designation of the current presiding officer.

**CHAMBER**

The House or Senate assembly room where sessions are held.

**COLA**

Cost-of-living adjustment.

**COMMITTEE**

A subdivision of the House or Senate that considers legislation. Committees also undertake investigations within their areas of expertise. Most committees are divided into specialized subcommittees. Committees and subcommittees hold hearings and debate legislation. Most amendments to legislation occur at this level.

**CONFEREES**

Senate or House members appointed to serve on conference committees. Conferees are often appointed from the committee or committees that reported the legislation and they are expected to try to uphold the Senate or House position on measures when they negotiate with conferees from the other body.

B. Glossary of Legislative Terms *(continued)*

**CONFERENCE COMMITTEE**

A temporary, ad hoc panel composed of House and Senate members who work out differences in legislation that has passed both chambers.

**CONFERENCE REPORT**

The compromise product negotiated by the conference committee. The conference report is submitted to the House and Senate for approval.

**DISTRICT**

The area of the state represented by a legislator.

**FISCAL YEAR**

Any accounting period of 12 months. The fiscal year for Illinois state government begins July 1 and ends June 30. The federal fiscal year begins October 1 and ends September 30.

**HEARING**

Committee session, usually open to the public, to take testimony to gather information and opinions on a proposed program or legislation.

**LOBBYIST**

An individual who seeks to influence the outcome of legislation or administrative decisions. The law requires some lobbyists to formally register.

**MINORITY LEADER**

The highest ranking minority party post; chief policy and political strategist for the minority party.

**MOTION**

A formal request for action made by a legislator during a committee hearing or floor session.

**READING**

Presentation of a bill in the Illinois General Assembly. A bill is either in first, second or third reading until it is passed by both houses.

**REAPPORTIONMENT**

The redrawing of election-district boundaries.

**RECESS**

An official pause of any length in a committee hearing or floor session that halts the proceedings for a period of time but does not have the finality of adjournment. At the federal level, a recess may refer to a break of a number of days in a legislative session.

**REFERENDUM**

The method by which a measure adopted by the legislature may be submitted to the electorate for a vote.

**RESOLUTION**

An opinion expressed by one or both houses that does not have the force of law.

**RULES**

Those ideas that govern the operation of either or both houses.

**SENATE PRESIDENT**

The highest-ranking, presiding officer of the majority party in the Illinois Senate.

**SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE**

The highest-ranking, presiding officer of the majority party in either the US or Illinois House.

**SURPLUS**

The amount by which revenues exceed spending.

**UNFUNDED MANDATES**

Any provision in legislation, statute, or regulation that imposes a responsibility on a state or local government for which adequate funding to carry out the responsibility is not appropriated.

**VETO**

The rejection of a bill by a governor or president.





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