



CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

TIPS FOR FAMILIES WANTING TO TALK TO THEIR LEGISLATORS

Identify the legislators (House & Senate) in whose district you live- Legislators are more responsive to voters who live in their district (“constituents”).

- Find your state legislators (PA Senate and House) by entering your home address: <https://www.palegis.us/find-my-legislator>
- Find your Congressperson and US Senator by your address: <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>
- Be aware state legislators don’t have authority over the federal budget, federal laws or policies of federal agencies and vice versa.

Request a meeting

- Best way is to ask for an in-person visit with your legislator in their local office. May just be with their staff but still worthwhile.
- Go to legislators with optimism and ideas to share, and help your legislators see and feel your issue.

Prepare your family’s story- not just the challenges, but also the value that comes to your community when your loved one has the support needed to be a full member of their family and community (community engagement, enabling family life, financial benefits from family members being able to keep jobs and pay taxes).

Bring your loved one to the meeting, if possible, even if they have challenging behaviors.

- Prepare your loved one for the meeting using role play/modeling.
- Give them opportunity to engage in the meeting.
- Arrange for someone to support that individual, besides you, who can take the individual out of the meeting if they become too upset.
- If not physically possible to bring loved one to the legislator’s office, ask for a video call so the loved one can participate from home.

Define the “ask” - what do you want your legislator to do?

- Connect your personal story to the broader issue.
- Be specific- not just “fix it.” They are relying on you for ideas. The initial ask can be something simple (maybe write a letter or make a call).
- If the legislator tells you they aren’t on the relevant legislative committee, ask them to talk to a colleague who is.
- If asking for more funding, how much more?
- Be prepared to discuss ways to find the additional funds you’re requesting (for example, consider taxing games of chance; legalizing and taxing marijuana).

Develop respected relationships with legislators

- Follow up from initial meeting with a thank you letter.
- Provide information, articles and data relevant to the issue discussed to become a trusted source of information.
- Continue to have contacts with your legislator after your initial office meeting –update them about your loved one or bills that that you are interested in or concerned about.
- Become a trusted source of information
 - Research and be able to provide source information
- Don't make assertions that you can't document

Other potential activities

- Connect with advocacy organizations that share your concerns and participate in their efforts, including in-person meetings.
- Support those legislators that support you by working on their campaigns or making contributions.
- Connect your legislative advocacy to advocacy with state agencies and the Governor.
- Use social media to get your issue and your advocacy noticed.

Patience & persistence

- It often takes years to make progress- take the long view.
- Set-backs are inevitable- learn from them.
- Celebrate small successes (such as getting your issue noticed) to keep momentum and share those successes with other families.

Prepared by the Children's Medicaid Defense Project based on conversations with Rep. Dan Frankel, Rep. Joe Hohenstein, Tom Carasit (Vision for Equality), Erin Gabriel (PHAN), Ned Whitehead (Vision for Equality), Dr. Josie Badger (J. Badger Consulting) and Christina Abernathy.

For more information, see the videos from which these tips were compiled at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_wXBuYFwXE and

<https://youtu.be/ckDChZUR0Sk>