

Legislative advocacy made easy

AN ADVOCATE'S GUIDE TO CONNECTING WITH LAWMAKERS

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Speaking to state legislators is an extremely important skill to have as an advocate. Whether it is learning more about bills, speaking about the budget or getting legislators to see the real problems, advocates play the role of the liaison between survivors and legislators. This technical assistance bulletin will give you basic information about the legislative process, give you tips on speaking with legislators and teach you ways to stay up to date on current legislation that may impact survivors of sexual violence.

ABOUT THE PA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Pennsylvania state government consist of legislative bodies: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representative is made up of 203 members who serve two-year terms. The Senate is made up of 50 members who serve six-year terms.

Senators and representatives have a local office in the community they serve and a state office which is located in the Capitol building in Harrisburg. Eligible voters in Pennsylvania elect representatives as well as senators.

Terms to Know

Bill: a draft of a proposed law presented to legislation

Act: a bill that has been enacted into law after being passed in both the House and Senate, and reviewed and signed by the governor

Amendment: any alteration made to a bill or clause

General Assembly: the legislative body of senators and representatives



PENNSYLVANIA COALITION AGAINST RAPE

125 North Enola Drive • Enola, PA 17025

717-728-9740 • 800-692-7445 • TTY 877-585-1091 • pcar.org

© Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape 2016. All rights reserved.



Identifying your Legislators

Before you can begin to advocate, you must identify your legislators! Here's how:

- Go to <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/>
- Click "Find My Legislator" on the left side of the webpage
- You can search by district, county or address
- If you search by your home address you will learn who is representing you in the House and the Senate as well as the district they represent.
- Clicking on the name of the legislator will show you contact information, bibliography and any additional information available. You can also sign-up for your legislators electronic newsletter!

IDENTIFYING YOUR LEGISLATORS

Once you know your legislators, it is important to build relationships with them. Elected officials can support or oppose bills and amendments, changing the course of legislation with a single vote. Developing a relationship with your legislators is a good practice that can create safer communities for the survivors you serve. Visiting legislators at their office creates a safe space for them and shows you are serious about the issues at hand and willing to support them if they are willing to support you.

Get to know your legislators before you need them! Invite them to your agency's activities and events. Schedule a time when the legislature is not in session to introduce yourself and your agency. That way you are already familiar to them when you are advocating for certain policy issues.

TIPS FOR SPEAKING WITH LEGISLATORS

Legislators are busy people and often only have time to hold brief meetings. Meetings can be scheduled by contacting your legislator's office and finding a time that suits you both.

Before the appointment, research the legislator. Find out what committees they serve on, their roles and attempt to find common ground. Visit their website to learn where they went to school, if they have children and what issues they support. Try to make a connection with this information in order to add meaning to the meeting and start the conversation. Speak about your agency and mission and define the objectives you would like to accomplish during the visit.

— LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY —



TIPS FOR SPEAKING WITH LEGISLATORS

Prepare for your visit by bringing information, such as brochures or one-page flyers that will help provide accurate information you can leave with the legislator. Be sure to provide only a few key resources; this will keep your messages clear and concise. By creating a positive, working relationship, you can influence legislators to share information with others in office.

It is important to speak to your legislator with confidence. While legislators know a great deal about the legislative process, they look to their constituents and other experts in the field to inform them on issues.

Advocates should be prepared for multiple groups advocating for the same issues and take steps to ensure consistency across talking points with other advocates. Highlight three or four important points when creating press releases and bulletins and stick to those points when speaking with legislators. This way, all legislators are hearing the same information which improves credibility about the issue.

Remember, you are an expert in your field, and this is an opportunity to share your expertise and ensure that the legislator is informed about the issue!

After speaking with a legislator, remember to thank them and their staff for their efforts. Handwrite a thank you note and send it via mail as soon as possible. You may also consider leaving a token such as a pen or notepad as a friendly reminder of the issues you discussed and the community organization you represent. If questions came up during the meeting that you could not answer, be sure to follow-up with the information; this will show your ability to provide information and act as a resource in the future.



IMPORTANT BILL INFORMATION

Every new piece of legislation is created in either the House or the Senate. It is required to pass through both chambers in order to be reviewed and signed by the governor. The process of passing a bill could take months or even years in the legislative system. After bills get passed and new laws go into effect, it is important for you as an advocate to understand the new legislation that impacts both survivors and the work you do in the community.

How do I find and follow a bill?

- Go to www.legis.state.pa.us
- Search for a bill in one of two ways:
 - o Type the topic of the bill you are searching for into the search engine at the top-right corner of the webpage and the most recent bills regarding that topic will appear.
 - o If you know the bill number you are searching for, type in the year, the party that introduced it and the bill number.
 - o For example, if you are looking for House Bill 1 from 2014, type "2014HB1."
- Once you find the bill you can see the legislator who sponsored it, what committee it is currently in, a brief synopsis and access the full text.
- While on the page featuring the bill, a small yellow box will appear on the right side with an envelope graphic reading, "Subscribe for updates using 'PaLegis' Notifications." Click on the bill and enter your email address.
- You will now receive automatic email updates when the bill goes to a new committee, goes to the floor for a vote and when it is passed.

Those in office hold a lot of power when it comes to bills being introduced and ultimately becoming laws. You can use your voice to advocate for survivors by speaking with your legislators about issues that are important to you and by voting in local and state elections.

You play a significant role every day advocating for the rights and needs of survivors of sexual violence in your communities. Advocating with your legislator is one more way that you can use your voice to make a difference!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Zelner is a graduate student in the School of Social Work and Gerontology at Shippensburg University.

RESOURCES

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape:
Laws & Policy
<http://www.pcar.org/laws-policy>

National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
<http://endsexualviolence.org/>

[Sign-up for the PCAR legislative advocacy newsletter.](#)



PENNSYLVANIA COALITION AGAINST RAPE

125 North Enola Drive • Enola, PA 17025

717-728-9740 • 800-692-7445 • TTY 877-585-1091 • pcar.org

© Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape 2016. All rights reserved.