



A Calendar for Advocacy When to Talk with Your Legislator and What You Should Talk About

These are general rules for state legislatures, but timelines may differ based on state.

Be aware of Do's and Don'ts as a constituent, professional, or member or leader of a professional organization such as state DEC subdivisions.

State/Local Guidelines

The Legislative Session (generally January- May)

At this point, bills have been decided and voting on bills is happening. Legislators are very busy during the session (usually around 120-130 days) and work 80-100 hour weeks. During this time, suggested advocacy strategies include:

- Use a bill tracker to follow the progress of bills, know when they will be introduced and when they will be discussed in committees.
- Connect with legislators related to bills that are currently in the legislature.
At this time, it is appropriate to discuss your expertise about the bills that are moving through the legislature at this time. You can write letters, emails, or have individual conversations with legislators.

You can also make yourself available to testify in committee hearings if you have deep experience with the bill or the content of the bill. You can recruit families and colleagues to testify and share their experience.

During this time, if you cannot get in touch directly with your legislator, you can connect with their staff members.

- Observe a legislative session in the House and Senate.
- Often during the legislative session, early childhood groups, lobbyists, policymakers and/or professional organizations will host a Day on the Hill. Days on the Hill allow you easy access to legislators and the inner workings of the Capitol in your state. This is a time to build your confidence and comfort with being at the Capitol and interacting in this way. Sign up to attend.
- Host a Day on the Hill sponsored by your state DEC subdivision.

- Be present at the Capitol as much as possible. This means that you are visible in sessions and in committees.
Be aware that committee meetings are often live-streamed or on a satellite site so you do not have to be on site.

Off Session- Information Gathering (generally May- August)

- Take a tour of the state Capitol (if you have not done that since a middle school field trip).
- During the summer months, legislators are often gathering information in the form of town halls, focus groups, and advisory committees. It is a good idea to introduce yourself to legislators at these events or request to be part of their advisory committees. This is when you can offer your expertise and experience and share data about specific issues that are close to you. This expertise, experience and data are the early steps in how policy is created and how bills are drafted.
- Meet one on one with legislators. More likely, this is the time of the year that they have time to sit down and listen to you and get to know you and what you know.
- Create policy briefs to share with legislators and policymakers.
- Ask a state legislator (or panel of state legislators) to attend a state DEC subdivision meeting to connect with members. Learn about the legislator(s) and allow the legislator(s) to learn about your subdivision.
Example: Attend a legislator town hall and meet with them afterward and share a policy brief and storytelling session about the impact of inclusion on a child and family in your program.

Off Session- Preparing Bills (generally August- December)

- Continue to meet with legislators as they are available- share information, data and experience.
- Bills are being drafted. Be aware of the bills that your legislator or legislators who often work on bills related to early childhood and early childhood special education are proposing. Offer your support as you can.
- Be budget aware. Often during this time, a governor's proposed budget will be released. This will offer insight into how the state government will use funds and what the priorities for the year will be.