

BE THE VOICE FOR NORTH CAROLINA'S CHILDREN



NC Child Advocacy TOOLS & TIPS



NC CHILD *Advocacy* TOOLKIT

This advocacy toolkit is designed to support parents, child care service providers, practitioners, and other child advocates in participating in the public policy-making process.

OUR PRIORITY AREAS:

NC Child focuses on policy areas that support children’s development, and ensure the future prosperity of our state. Our mission is to build a strong North Carolina by advancing public policies to ensure all children—regardless of race, ethnicity, or place of birth—have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Children of color face structural barriers to success due to the presence of institutionalized racism in our state’s policies, allocation of public resources, and decision-making processes. NC Child is building a state in which the color of our children’s skin will not determine their life outcomes.



High-Quality Early Childhood Education



Healthy Children



Nurturing Homes & Communities



Family Economic Security

HOW DO WE ADVOCATE?

NC Child staff frequently participates in direct legislative advocacy, as our lobbyists and child issue experts work to prioritize the needs of children in policy decisions. In addition to direct advocacy, the NC Child Advocacy Network (CAN) brings people and groups together from across the state in order to improve child well-being.



Throughout this guide, wherever you see this icon click to download a worksheet or set of worksheets to help you plan your advocacy activity. Download the complete toolkit and supplemental worksheets at:

www.bit.ly/NCCtoolkit



HOW DO *you* ADVOCATE FOR NC'S *children?*



Cassandra Brooks

Owner, Little Believers Academy

“I have spoken to House representatives. The thing that makes the difference with representatives is you have to speak from your heart. I did look over the bill, but I think a good portion of it is from the heart. From that day forward, I felt more empowered to continue this push, to push for changes. Some of these [advocacy] opportunities I never even imagined, I’m just a little lady doing child care and loving children. I know during my first visit, I was a little nervous and not knowing what to expect. But they want to hear from us, they would rather talk to constituents than the lobbyists.”

Maya Nair

NC Child Youth Advocacy Council member

“Through the Youth Advocacy Council, I have gained a new outlook on being a catalyst for change in my community—a slow but very worthwhile process. As a youth advocate, sometimes it is hard to have your opinion heard in the professional world but NC Child gave me the platform, where I am standing today, and the microphone, the reason why I am able to speak to you all today, to express my perspective and ideas on issues that mean most to me and my generation.”



Sheila Arias

NC Child Parent Advisory Council member

“It’s about meeting people where they are and acknowledging what is comfortable to them. I know there are different levels of comfort when advocating for your kids and your family. And I’ve learned that. But you can still make a phone call, you can still send a text. It’s about recognizing your strength and what you bring to the table that other people don’t have. It just takes one person to make a difference.”



INTRODUCTION *to* ADVOCACY

Advocacy is defined as making the case for a cause that matters to you and building support for that issue among community members, elected officials, the media, and other key leaders.^{1 2} You are an advocate if you have worked to secure the best care for a child; spoken out against the unfair treatment of another person; participated in a public meeting about an issue you care about; or called or emailed an elected official. If you work with children, help families in your community, register voters, or speak up for a child in your life, you are already an advocate for children.

Lobbying is communicating to elected officials in order to influence their decision on a specific issue or piece of legislation. Nonprofit organizations can lobby, however there are restrictions on the time and resources that can be dedicated to lobbying activities.²

WHAT CAN NONPROFITS DO?

Individuals and nonprofit organizations may participate broadly in various actions, but organizations have specific allowable activities. Check out these resources for more information on allowable activities for 501c3 organizations.

ORGANIZATION

Bolder Advocacy (Alliance For Justice)

Democracy North Carolina

National Council of Nonprofits

Nonprofit Vote

WEBSITE

www.bolderadvocacy.org

www.democracync.org/take-action/nonprofit-voter-engagement

www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy

www.nonprofitvote.org

TYPES OF ADVOCACY

There are many ways to engage in advocacy. Each action creates a different level of impact. We mobilize others around key issues related to children and families. NC Child aims to increase awareness and influence public debate through the following:

- **Community-Based Advocacy:** Building skills and knowledge among individuals and organizations across the state.
- **Legislative Advocacy:** Influencing elected officials in positions of power to act on child policy issues.
- **Digital Advocacy:** Use social media and the web to keep people updated and encourage them to take action.

CHOOSING *and* FRAMING *your* ISSUE

One of the most important parts of advocacy work is to choose your issue – not just focus on a social problem. Advocacy focuses on addressing issues, securing and promoting social justice, and shaping outcomes to create systemic change.

Whereas a problem is a broad area of concern such as poverty or child abuse, an issue is something more specific that can be changed, such as expanding Medicaid coverage or instituting universal paid parental leave. Framing is how you talk about that issue, so that it connects with people's shared values and moves them to action.



WORKSHEET

*Plan your Issue Campaign Strategy:
Midwest Academy Strategy Chart*

www.bit.ly/NCCtoolkit

BE INFORMED ABOUT THE ISSUES: *Choose a relevant issue. Study it carefully so that you understand it both within the context of a greater social problem, and how it operates in your local community.*

- Read the local paper, online news, and social media to understand how issues specifically affect your home community.
- Get to know people whose perspectives may be different from your own, and how they view the same issue. Attend local meetings held by local councils or community organizations such as: Citizen Advisory Councils, Rotary or Kiwanis Clubs, or Town Council.
- Research and review data related to your issue. Visit the KIDS COUNT Data Center for North Carolina-specific child well-being data: www.datacenter.kidscount.org/NC

DEVELOP YOUR PERSONAL STORY AND MESSAGE: *Sharing your story is powerful, and important to shaping public dialogue about an issue.*

- Think about your connection to an issue and how it directly or indirectly impacts you, your family, your friends, or your community. Storytelling is one of the most powerful parts of any effective advocacy campaign.
- Know your audience. Work with other advocates to form a common message that can be communicated via multiple channels such as letters, emails, phone calls, meetings, video, and social media.
- Clearly identify the problem, solution, and action: Inform the audience what the problem is, how it can be influenced, and what they should do about in just a few sentences.³



WORKSHEET

*Organizing tools for effective
advocacy: Community Tool Box*

www.bit.ly/NCCtoolkit

BUILDING INDIVIDUAL *and* LOCAL CAPACITY

COMMUNITY-BASED ISSUE ADVOCACY

CONNECT WITH OTHER ADVOCATES AND RESOURCES: *Meaningful advocacy involves coalition building and collaborating with others who have an interest in your issue.*

- Build relationships with local businesses and community institutions.
- Identify local coalitions or advocacy organizations that can support your advocacy efforts or events.
- Work to develop your own advocacy skills as well as those of fellow community members. Look for opportunities to host trainings, participate in webinars, and share helpful resources like this advocacy toolkit.

KNOW THE POLITICAL LAY OF THE LAND: *Familiarize yourself with the local and state political landscape.*

- Find out who represents you, where to vote, and when to vote in North Carolina. www.ncvoter.org/how-to-vote-in-north-carolina
- Look up the legislative committees and administrative agencies that deal with the policies related to your issue.
- Recognize what motivates key decision makers. Assess their ability to be influenced on key issues, and who can influence them.

ELEVATE THE CONVERSATION: *Seek out opportunities to talk about your issue with key leaders and decision makers.*

- Schedule meetings with elected officials in the home district, as well as other community leaders, to talk about the issues that matter to you.
- Organizing your own event can be a powerful way to raise visibility, however it requires a lot of work. Smaller letter writing campaigns or phone banking events can be easier to coordinate and have just as much impact.
- Consider writing a letter to the editor or opinion piece (op-ed) for the local newspaper.



WORKSHEET
*How to write an op-ed
or letter to the editor*
www.bit.ly/NCCtoolkit

ENGAGING *with* ELECTED OFFICIALS

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY 101

The North Carolina General Assembly has a total of 170 members:

- 120 members in the House of Representatives
- 50 members in the Senate

The leadership for the two chambers are the Speaker of the House, and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate. The terms for all NC House and Senate seats last two years. Elections are held during even-numbered years. To find out who represents you, visit www.ncleg.gov/RnR/Representation. You can also find out how to contact your state legislators, and on which committees they serve.

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY ENGAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS: *Increasing Your Impact*

Both individuals and nonprofits can engage with elected officials on the issues they care about. When deciding on how to engage with legislators, it is important to consider both the time you have available, and the potential impact of your actions. Higher-impact actions like arranging a meeting will take more time and preparation, but they often result in more meaningful action from the elected official. NC Child can provide assistance with any of the following actions as you make plans to engage with your legislators.

LOW IMPACT

- Sign an online petition
- Send a form email
- Connect with an elected official on social media
- Use social media to connect with fellow advocates

MEDIUM IMPACT

- Send an original email or letter
- Make a phone call to an elected official
- Write a letter to the editor (LTE) or opinion piece
- Attend a community town hall hosted by an elected official

HIGH IMPACT

- Schedule a meeting at the NC General Assembly with your legislator
- Schedule a one-on-one meeting with your legislator in the home district
- Host a community event or forum and invite your legislator

BE KIND TO THE STAFF

Most state legislators only have one Legislative Assistant, and sometimes a student intern in the summer. These are the people you will engage with most often. Building positive relationships with legislative assistants and other staff members is just as important as getting to know your legislator, since these folks are the gate keepers for elected officials.



WORKSHEET

How to meet with your legislator

www.bit.ly/NCCtoolkit

INCREASING TIME COMMITMENT

WHAT LEGISLATORS *say* ABOUT ENGAGING *with* ADVOCATES

Don't assume your legislators are familiar with all the details of the issues that matter to you. This is where your advocacy can make a big difference. Legislators want to know how certain issues impact their home district. They also want to be responsive to the needs of their constituents. At the same time, legislators often face pressure from fellow lawmakers and other lobbying groups, as well as the desire to get re-elected.

Providing real-life examples and personal stories about the issues that impact your life and your community can help demonstrate to your legislators why these issues deserve their attention.⁴ Just remember that each legislator's engagement preferences are unique. Genuine relationship-building with the legislator and his or her staff can go a long way.



Rep. Kandie Smith
(D-Pitt County)

“My best and most preferred way to engage is when I do have events like a town hall. This gives constituents a chance to ask questions. Sometimes people don't know what to ask until others ask. When you have a group, they work off of each other's synergy.”



Rep. Graig Meyer
(D-Caswell, Orange Counties)

“It's helpful to make a concrete ask that can be followed up on by the legislator. One thing not to do is to make a general ask because when constituents walk out the door, I haven't committed to anything. A specific ask means I have something to think about. It does make a difference if the ask comes from someone I know.”



Rep. Holly Grange
(R-New Hanover County)

“If you have a personal story, that will get past my screeners. It's not necessary that someone is sending me something as a constituent. Don't be afraid to call, I might not answer, but you can leave a message and I'll respond. If there is something in the community, invite me to it. I don't mind being on panels and I don't mind taking questions in a public setting.”

AMPLIFYING *your* ISSUE

DIGITAL ADVOCACY

Know your audience. The best way to communicate with anyone is by using the channels that they most prefer. For some, that's a phone call or text. Email updates and action alerts are popular tools, but they are losing effectiveness due to sheer volume. Sharing information on Facebook may be the best for your audience, while for others a group text works well. Do some research to understand which methods your audience prefers. If you don't know, ask.

MOBILIZING VIA EMAIL

As of this writing, most people use mobile phones to read email. That means your emails need to be very short and concise in order to be effective.

- Get to the point right away. If someone has to scroll down to find out what you want them to do, you have probably lost them.
- Keep sentences very short.
- Keep paragraphs to just one or two sentences.
- Keep your whole email to 20 lines of text or less.
- Use a clear, catchy subject line that makes it obvious what the email content will be.
- Sending a one-time email update will not result in increased issue awareness or action. Be sure to follow up.

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVOCACY

Social media can be a great way to connect with public figures and legislators. If your legislator is active on social media, follow them and engage with the content they post. Using Facebook or Twitter to publicly thank an elected official can be a great way to show your appreciation for their work on your issue - or to let them know how you want them to vote on something important. However, social media engagement with elected officials is most effective in the context of a genuine relationship.

WHICH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS?

You do not need to have a presence on every social media platform. Instead, focus on posting consistent, high-quality content to the platform that your audience uses most. Just be sure to use eye-catching photos, because social media is image-driven.

According to the Pew Research Center,⁵

- Facebook and YouTube are the most popular sites among US adults, with users skewing older. Roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of Facebook users say they use the site daily.
- Snapchat and Instagram are especially popular among users 18-24 years old.
- Twitter is particularly popular with reporters, politicians, and politically-engaged younger people.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES *to* HELP YOU BE AN EFFECTIVE CHILD ADVOCATE

NC Child is here to support your advocacy for children. We have additional trainings and resources that provide information about building your skills and engaging with your elected officials. For more ideas on advocacy actions you can take on behalf of children and families, consult the following recommended organizations:

ORGANIZATION

MomsRising
Color of Change
The Ounce of Prevention Fund
Zero to Three
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

WEBSITE

www.momsrising.org
www.colorofchange.org
www.theounce.org/resources/advocacy-tools
www.zerotothree.org/advocate
www.aecf.org/resources/child-advocacy-primer

DOCUMENT SOURCES:

- 1 Bolder Advocacy. <https://www.bolderadvocacy.org/advocacy-defined/>
- 2 Early Childhood Advocacy Toolkit. The Ounce of Prevention Fund.
<https://www.theounce.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/EarlyChildhoodAdvocacyToolkit.pdf>
- 3 #KeepMarching: MomsRising Advocacy and Organizing Tactics and Tips. MomsRising.
https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.momsrising.org/images/Keep_Marching_Toolkit_2_1.pdf
- 4 Advocacy 101. Autism Society of North Carolina
<https://www.autismsociety-nc.org/wp-content/uploads/Advocacy-101-Toolkit-web-links.pdf>
- 5 Use of different online platforms by demographic groups. Pew Research Center.
https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/ft_19-04-10_socialmedia2019_useofdifferent/

Connect
with us!

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