



ADVOCACY HANDBOOK FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

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“Why Advocate?”

All citizens have a right to make the sort of contact with elected officials that are described above. Citizen participation is a cornerstone of a democratic society. Citizens can participate in the life of their community in many forms.

The Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers calls upon social workers to “...facilitate informed participation by the public in shaping policies and institutions.” (NASW, 1999). Additionally, Section 6.04 (a) of the Code, states that, “social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and promote social justice” (NASW, 1999).

The International Federation of Social Workers states in its definition of social work, “*The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work*” (IFWS, 2012).

As a social worker you can play a critical role in convincing North Carolina’s Legislators and the Governor that funding for human service programs and programs that support best social work practice should be protected and expanded. You have first-hand knowledge of

the importance of support for critical services that impact your clients, your agencies, and your community.

“You can make a difference.”

Social Workers have reported that they do not like to get involved in political activity because they feel uncomfortable in a domain that is foreign to them. They do not trust politicians and do not trust the political process. These feelings of being disconnected are the same feelings many of our clients have about our social service programs. As professionals we are called upon to be aware of our feelings, use our professional skills, and be good problem solvers. Social Workers are good communicators and can be excellent advocates with legislators and other decision makers.

People who are employed by public agencies must be aware that they have a special responsibility to not use or create the perception that public funds are being used to try and influence public policy. Be aware of agency policy on such issues. For some federal and state employees the Hatch Act imposes clear limitations on such activities. Use common sense and (1) Do not use public resources for mailings; (2) Do not use agency stationary for letters (you can tell them where you work); (3) Use your own time for advocacy activity unless you have permission from your agency to advocate on their time; (4) Do not make calls from work phone; and, (5) Use your own phone.

WORKING WITH LEGISLATORS

When the legislators are not in session, send correspondence to their home or local addresses. A list of Raleigh and home office addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses is available on the website of the NC General Assembly (www.ncleg.net). This site will help you locate your representatives by county.

You can reach the governor year round at:

The Honorable Governor (*Insert Current Governor*)
116 West Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27603-8001

What can help?

Write letters to your local newspaper about issues of concern to you. Write your legislators and ask them to support specific programs. Additionally, there are several other modes of contact or advocacy that have an impact on the members of the state legislature. They are:

- Phone contact
- Meeting with a legislator
- Becoming a lobbyist
- Supporting NC-PACE

OTHER WAYS TO INFLUENCE POLICY

A personal, well written, original letter will have a considerable impact on legislators. Following are some helpful tips for writing legislators:

- Make sure a return address is contained within the letter. Remember, typed
- Send your letters are easier to read than handwritten letters.
- Send your letter via traditional mail or via e-mail.
- Be sure to identify the town/city and county in which you live.
- State what is being asked of the legislator/governor and request a response.
- Be brief and to the point. Try to make the letter no longer than one typewritten page. Send only the original letter, not a copy. Personalize your letter to strengthen your points.
- Be factual and support positions with information.
- If you know the bill number and title, be sure to refer to it in your letter.
- Remain courteous; do not threaten or cajole. Simply explain the local impact the legislation would have.
- Write a second letter of thanks to legislators who vote to support your initial request.
- Be sure to address the elected official properly. The governor is addressed as "The Honorable Governor (*first name, last name*).” Legislators are addressed as "The Honorable (*name of senator or representative*).” You do not put Senator or Honorable after Honorable in salutations to legislators.
- When the General Assembly is in session, send correspondence to legislators at their Raleigh office.

Following are two sample letters that you can send to your legislators:

**ALTERNATIVE ONE:
Client Advocacy**

Your street address
City, state, zip code
Phone number
Date

The Honorable (full name)
Address

Dear Representative OR Senator (last name):

I am a registered voter in (City, County, District) and I work in the field of (mental health, school social work, public welfare, etc.). It has come to my attention that the NC General Assembly is considering (describe action and if possible give a bill number). I am concerned about the negative impact this action will have on (client group)... OR, I support this bill (give reasons for support. Also, give cost implications and anecdotal information about client impact.).

These services are critical to my clients and to many others in North Carolina with similar issues.

I realize that you are faced with many tough decisions as you prepare the state's budget. But, not providing services to people who desperately need them is not the way to balance the budget. Have the courage to do the right thing and invest in all our people. Please let me know your position on removing funds from the states budget for (your issue).

Sincerely,

Your name

[Make sure you personalize the letter to strengthen its impact, **but stay brief and to the point.** **Try to keep the letter to one page.** You can use the letter text in e-mail.]

**ALTERNATIVE TWO:
Professional Advocacy**

Your street address
City, state, zip code
Phone number
Date

The Honorable (full name)
Address

Dear Representative OR Senator (last name):

I am a registered voter in (City, County, District) and I am a social worker at (place and location). It has come to my attention that the NC General Assembly is considering (describe action and if possible give a bill number). I am concerned about the negative impact this action will have on social work education in NC.... OR, I support action being taken to improve support for social work in NC (Give cost implications and anecdotal information about client impact.).

(If you are writing about the Child Welfare Education Collaborative remind them that students pay back educational support with services in their counties. Include concerns about incidents of child deaths in other states.)

I realize that you are faced with many tough decisions as you prepare the state's budget. But, not providing services to people who desperately need them is not the way to balance the budget. Have the courage to do the right thing and invest in all our people. Please let me know your position on removing funds from the states budget for (*your issue*).

Sincerely,

Your name

[Make sure you personalize the letter to strengthen its impact, **but stay brief and to the point.** **Try to keep the letter to one page.** You can use the letter text in e-mail.]

CALLING YOUR LEGISLATORS

If you cannot reach the legislator directly, leave a phone number where calls can be returned to and ask to speak to available staff. They will notify the legislator of contact of calls received and are often very helpful.

- Before you call, jot down the main points that you want to include in your conversation. Practice what you are going to say.
- Ask to speak directly to the legislator.
- Identify yourself and where you are from (city, county).
- Be brief and concise. State the purpose for your call.
- Express your appreciation if the legislator is supportive of your issue. If the legislator is undecided, offer to provide more information.
- If you know the bill number and title, be sure to refer to it in your conversation.
- Be prepared to spend more time if the legislator wants more information.
- Remember to be courteous and to thank the legislator or staff person for his/her time.
- Send a follow-up letter restating the substance of the call and the legislator's position on the issue as it was understood (whether there was direct contact with the legislator or with his/her staff). Again, thank the legislator for his/her time.

The content of a phone call to a legislator is very similar to that of a letter. Be prepared to answer questions and provide additional information. Following is a sample phone call script that you can use as a guide for calling legislators.

Sample call to a legislator:

“Senator/Representative (**last name**), my name is.... and I am a resident of (city) in (county). I am calling today to ask your support of” (describe your issue in a sentence or two).

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In another few sentences, tell them why you have concerns about this issue.

For example:

- I work in a mental health center with (population), and....
- I am a school social worker, and....
- I work in a DSS with abused children, and....

Give them a couple of examples of important pieces of information.

- Data on the number of un-served mentally ill.
- Data about school dropout rates.
- Data about increased reports of child abuse.

I realize that you are faced with many tough decisions as you prepare the state’s budget. I am calling to express my support for (give a bill number or concise description of issue or I am concerned about potential funding cuts or change in (give bill or concise description of issue).

What is your position on removing funds from this important area? Or what is your position on support for this critical area?

Give the legislator an opportunity to express his/her opinion without interruption. If the legislator indicates that he/she will fight budget cuts to your services or supports the action on a bill that you support, thank him/her. If the legislator indicates that he/she is undecided or that he/she is in favor of these cuts or does not support your bill or issue, politely ask them to reconsider and state again how important it is for your clients to receive these services or for the profession to be strengthened. Offer to meet with the legislator and/or provide additional information about the impact of reduced funds for services or lack of support for your issue.

For questions you can’t answer, offer to find the answers for him/her. Offer the legislator your name and phone number in case he/she has additional question at a later time. NEVER SAY WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW TO BE TRUE! Just let them know you will get back to them immediately with the answer. Legislators appreciate honesty and you will be viewed as having credibility.

Thank the legislator for his/her time.

[Remember to follow up your phone call with a thank-you letter.]

For professional issues use the same format as above.

VISITING YOUR LEGISLATORS

A face-to-face meeting with your legislators is an excellent opportunity to discuss the proposed budget cuts and their impact on you and your family. The following guidelines may be helpful as you begin visiting your legislators.

- Develop and maintain a good working relationship directly with the legislators in your district.
- Always call ahead for an appointment and briefly explain the purpose of the meeting.
- Be on time and professionally dressed (NO JEANS).
- Keep your comments to the point and limit your presentation/discussion to the time scheduled, unless the legislator extends the meeting. (Refer to sample letter and phone call for some suggestions on how you might organize your comments.)
- Use bill numbers and titles when possible.
- Tell the legislator why the issue is important to you and to other constituents in his/her district.
- When possible and appropriate, bring consumers of services with you to talk with the legislators.
- Ask the legislator for his/her position on the issue and how he/she will vote. If supportive, thank him/her for the support. If undecided or for removing funds for services, ask if you can provide additional information on the issue.
- Always be courteous, even if the legislator disagrees with your position on the issue.
- Leave information for the legislator to review after your meeting.
- Thank the legislator for his/her time.
- Send a short letter thanking the legislator for the meeting.

OTHER FORMS OF ADVOCACY

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) primary functions include promoting the professional development of its members, establishing and maintaining professional standards of practice, advancing sound social policies for the betterment of the nation, and providing other services that protect its members and enhance their professional status (Barker, 2003).

The mission of the National Association of Social Workers-North Carolina (NASW-NC) chapter is to continue the mission of the national association as well as enhance the effective functioning and well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its work and advocacy. NASW-NC achieves this mission through Professional Advocacy (which has representation on at least 25 statewide coalitions) and Social Policy Advocacy.

On staff with NASW-NC is a Director of Advocacy, Policy and Legislation (DAPL) who is a registered lobbyist and represents NASW-NC members at the NC General Assembly.

The current Director of Advocacy, Policy and Legislation is Kay Paksoy; Kay has her Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). During legislative sessions, the DAPL reviews legislation that is introduced each day to assess its possible impact on social workers and their clients, and takes appropriate

action.

Other responsibilities of the DAPL include working with legislators to amend existing state statutes, representing social workers at state wide meetings focusing on different arenas of the social work profession and speaking to groups about the advocacy work of NASW-NC.

Lobbying in the NC Legislature on social work issues, such as insurance reimbursement, social work licensure, and increasing salaries to strengthen the profession, health insurance for all people, strengthening our state's education system, effectively changing the welfare reform system are just a few of NASW-NC responsibilities.

To register as a lobbyist:

- File a registration statement with the Secretary of State in person or by mail;
- Pay the \$200.00 registration fee at the time of registration; and
- File an authorization statement, registration fee and authorization statement is required for each principal a lobbyist represent.
- Additionally, a separate registration statement, registration fee, and authorization statement is required for each lobbyist a principal retains or employs.

SUPPORTING NC-PACE

What is PACE?

Political Action for Candidate Election (PACE) is NASW's Political action arm. As a political action committee, PACE endorses and financially contributes to candidates who support NASW's policy agenda, irrespective of party affiliation. The national PACE Board of Trustees endorses and contributes to federal candidates running for US House and Senate Seats; state chapter PACE units decide on local and state races.

NASW-NC also has its own political action committee known as NC-PACE (**P**olitical **A**ction for **C**andidate **E**lection). This committee helps elect candidates to public offices that will support legislation and policies consistent with the goals of the social work profession and the needs of those who are served by the social work profession in North Carolina.

How PACE Helps NASW- NC Reach its Goals

As a subsidiary of NASW, PACE functions to enhance the policymaking environment for the association. In addition to its major tasks, PACE strengthens the organization by:

- Recruiting members through personal contact, student outreach, and being a visible political force
- Improving NASW's image to candidates, members, and students
- Building capacity for political action within NASW through the field organizer project and by providing technical assistance to chapters
- Helping elect legislators who will advance NASW's legislative priorities, and where possible, specifically electing social workers

Available to members of NASW-NC is our Advocacy webpage under Government Relations at naswnc.org, which assists you in finding out what issues in both the State and Federal Legislatures that may affect you or your clients. This page will keep you informed about pending legislation that needs YOUR support and will offer suggestions as to how YOU can get involved.

“YOUR REPRESENTATIVE OR SENATOR...”

1. **KNOWS THAT “ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL.”** This quote by former Speaker Tip O’Neill means that office holders pay first allegiance to their districts, and consequently, their reelection. That is why local coalition contacts from their home are most effective.
2. **WANTS TO DO THE RIGHT THING:** Each of us wants to do a good job, but we sometimes forget that this basic human drive also applies to elected officials.
3. **OFTEN WANTS TO GET REELECTED:** Despite the fact that nearly all incumbents are reelected, they all thrive on their jobs and are constantly concerned with what they have to do to keep it or get a better one.
4. **WANTS TO BE RESPONSIVE:** He/she is in the business of pleasing people and wants to accommodate you – but not at any cost. Other considerations may prevent him/her from doing so.
5. **MAY KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE ISSUES THAT IS OF CONCERN TO YOU:** Unless your representative is a member of the Human Resources Committee, your representative probably knows little or nothing about your concerns. Share your knowledge.
6. **IS BESET BY CONFLICTING PRESSURES:** Fund new education programs and cut non-education programs. Don’t raise taxes. Don’t touch the cigarette or alcohol industries. Provide information about why funds for these services are so important to receive priority from our legislators.
7. **WANTS TO KNOW HOW LEGISLATION AFFECTS THE LOCAL DISTRICT:** This is where you are critical. You can show how a bill impacts the people back home. Be specific and use real-life examples.
8. **FIND IT HARD TO VOTE AGAINST A FRIEND BUT EASY TO VOTE AGAINST SOMEONE WE DON’T’ KNOW:** Votes in the legislature are taking money from one program to give to another. Unless your representative knows the impact that cuts have on programs in their district, it’s easy to accept the argument those programs can afford the cut or don’t need expansion.

Understanding Legislative Terms

Amendment

A proposed change to the language in a bill by adding, substituting, or omitting a portion of the legislation before final passage.

Appropriation

Legislation that funds an agency or program by directing the expenditure of money from the Budget Office.

Authorization

Legislation that authorizes, or permits the expenditure of funds for an agency or program, with the actual spending to be approved by the appropriations committees.

Bill

Legislation introduced in either the House or the Senate. House bills are designated by the prefix “H.B.,” Senate bills by “S.B.,” and then followed by the bill number. Bill numbers are determined by the order in which bills are introduced.

Caucus

A meeting of members of the same political party to determine the party’s position on legislative issues.

Committee

A subdivision of members of the House and Senate that prepares legislation for action by the parent chamber. Each committee has jurisdiction over certain subject matters and considers legislation pertaining to their jurisdiction. Most committees are further subdivided into subcommittees. There are two types of committees:

1. *Standing Committees* are permanent committees with a particular legislative jurisdiction.
2. *Joint Committees* have members from both the House and the Senate.

Committee Process

Once bills are introduced, they are referred to one of the committees where hearings are held, where amendments are considered, and the committee reports its recommendations to the legislative body.

Conference Committee

A committee made up of members from both chambers. Its purpose is to resolve the differences between the House and Senate version of a bill.

Constituent

Any citizen residing in a district or state represented by a House Representative or a Senator.

Continuing Appropriation

When a fiscal year begins and the legislature has not yet enacted all regular appropriation bills for that year, it passed a joint resolution “continuing appropriation” for government agencies at rate generally based on the previous year’s appropriations.

Co-sponsor

One who joins in sponsoring legislation. Co-sponsorship is a public demonstration of support for a measure.

Executive Session

A meeting of a Senate or House committee (or, occasionally of either chamber) that only its members may attend.

Expenditures

The actual spending of money, as distinguished from the appropriation of it.

Filibuster

A time-delaying tactic used by a minority in an effort to prevent a vote on a bill that probably would pass if brought to a vote.

Fiscal Year

The states annual accounting period, which begins July 1 and ends the following June 30. The fiscal year is designated by the year in which it ends.

H.B.

The initials “*H.B.*” before the number designate a bill originating in the House.

Hearings

A session of a legislative committee at which supporters and opponents express their views. The committee announces hearings from one day to many weeks in advance and may invite certain persons to testify. Persons who request to testify may be turned down by the committee, but they are often allowed to either appear in person or submit a written statement for the record.

Introduction

The original presentation of a bill.

Joint Committee

A committee made up of members of both the House and Senate

Joint Resolution

Just like a bill, a joint resolution requires the approval of both houses and has the force of law if approved. Joint resolutions are generally used in dealing with limited matters, such as a single appropriation for a specific purpose.

Legislative action

The preparation, research drafting, introduction, consideration, modification, amendment, approval, passage, enactment, tabling, postponement, defeat, or rejection of a bill, resolution, amendment, motion, report, nomination, appointment, or other matter by the legislature or by a member or employee of the legislature acting or purporting to act in an official capacity.

Marking Up a Bill

Going through a measure, usually in subcommittee and committee, taking it

section-by-section, revising language, and penciling in new phrases. If the bill is extensively revised, the new version may be introduced as a separate or “clean bill” with a new number.

Majority Leader

Floor leader, spokesperson, and strategist for the majority party.

Minority Leader

Floor Leader for the minority party.

Ranking Member

The most senior member of a committee from a particular party. Most often used to refer to the most senior member of the minority party.

Re-committal

Sending a bill back to the committee that reported it for consideration.

Report

Both a verb and a noun. A committee that has examined a bill refers it to the parent chamber by “reporting” its views and recommendations regarding the measure. A “report” describes the purpose and scope of a bill, along with supporting reasons. Opposing views as well as supplemental views of other members of the committee may be included.

Resolution

A resolution deals with matters entirely within the prerogatives of one chamber. It does not require passage by the other chamber and does not carry the force of law. Most resolutions deal with the rules of a chamber or are used to express the sentiments of a single house.

Rule

- A. House or Senate rules governing the conduct of business.

B. A “Rule” issued by the House Rules Committee on procedure for handling House bills.

S.B.

The initials “S.B.” before the number designate a bill originating in the Senate.

Sessions

Normally, the legislature consists of two sessions, with the long session beginning in January and ending when the legislature adjourns (odd years) and a short session (even years) that begins in May and goes until legislature adjourns.

Sponsor

The member of the legislature who introduces legislation.

Standing Committee

A committee that studies measures introduced within its jurisdiction and makes recommendations to its respective chamber concerning appropriate action.

Subcommittee

A subdivision of committee organized by subject matter.

Substitute

A motion, amendment, or entire bill that is introduced in place of pending legislation. Passage of a substitute kills the original measure.

Suspend the Rules

A motion to expedite passage of legislation whereby any member recognized by the Speaker may “move to suspend the rules and pass the bill.” This requires a two-thirds vote in the House and majority in the Senate.

This curriculum was developed for professionals and students in North Carolina to support their efforts to live up to the expectations of the NASW Code of Ethics. Developed by Dan Beerman, ACSW, LCSW, Professor with the NC A& T State University and UNC-Greensboro JMSW Program. Revised by Pamela Siobohn Moye, CCADS, MSW Intern, UNC-Chapel Hill; Doaw Xiong, BSW Intern, ECU, 2012.