

# Legislative Visit Toolkit



**COLORADO  
CHILDREN'S  
CAMPAIGN**  
*Every Chance for Every Child*

# YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

Did you know that most of the thinking that leads to policy decisions takes place before the legislative session? Your legislators don't make big decisions by themselves; they make them with the community members who seek them out to share their concerns, experiences and insights. Your legislators want to hear from you, their constituent. In fact, they need to hear from you to ensure the decisions they make reflect the needs of your community. Your state legislators are elected to represent you, and decisions about your child's health and well-being are too important to be left solely to others. Take advantage of your power by taking advantage of this toolkit and let's Speak Up For Kids!

- 1. Preparing for a legislative visit**
- 2. During the visit**
- 3. After the visit**
- 4. General tips for being an advocate**
- 5. Overview of the legislative process**
- 6. More resources for grassroots advocacy**

## TIPS FOR YOUR LEGISLATIVE VISIT

*Is a visit the same as a meeting?* Visits are informal. Legislators are busy, especially during the legislative session. They are running from committee meetings to the House or Senate floor, among other responsibilities. Luckily, your Speak Up For Kids advocacy coach knows how to make the most of short visit, even if it's a simple introduction, or walking with your legislator from one building to another. This guide prepares you to use your voice effectively and take advantage of even the briefest window.

*Why are we encouraging you to go in person when you can call or email your representative?* Building a relationship with your senator and representative is one of the most effective ways to influence the policy making process. Through the visit you put a face on the issues you care about.



# PHASE 1: PREPARING FOR A LEGISLATIVE VISIT

## STEP 1. FIND OUT WHO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS ARE

- Google search “Who are my elected official Colorado”  
OR
- Follow this [link https://leg.colorado.gov/find-my-legislator](https://leg.colorado.gov/find-my-legislator) and enter your zip code.

## STEP 2. LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR LEGISLATOR

- Know on which committees your legislators serve.
- How have they voted on the issues that matter to you?
- What are their particular areas of interest?

Limited biographical information and committee assignments can be found at [leg.colorado.gov/legislators](https://leg.colorado.gov/legislators). **(We have included biographies, including committee information, for your state senator and representative in this packet.)**

## STEP 3. PLAN AHEAD/ KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO ADDRESS

To ensure your visit with your legislator is effective as possible you should know what you would like to communicate to your legislator. What is the purpose of your visit?

- Do you simply want to get to know your legislator?
- Are you providing background information on an issue?
- Are you asking your legislator to support or oppose a specific bill?
- Do you have an idea for a bill that you'd like your legislator to consider?

Once you've identified the primary goal of your visit, decide what you want to say.

- Identify three key points and build from there.

## STEP 4. CALL AHEAD

When you call your legislator's office, you may reach the legislator, his/her aide or voicemail.

- Identify yourself as a constituent
- Mention when you plan to drop in and what you would like to talk about

**(Speak Up For Kids staff will communicate to legislators when you plan to be there)**

## TIPS FOR YOUR VISIT

- **Business attire** is recommended at the Capitol.
- **Rehearse!** It can be easy to get flustered and forget what you want to say once you're amidst the hustle and bustle of the Capitol.
- **Create a fact sheet.** To remind your legislator what you talked about and where you stand on the issue, create a one-page fact sheet to leave with them.
- **Don't use jargon.** Use straightforward language during your visit and in the fact sheet.
- **Strategize if you are going in a group.** Decide who will say what and identify one person to act as the point of contact.

## PHASE 2: DURING THE VISIT

### STEP 1. INTRODUCE YOURSELF AS A CONSTITUENT

- Who you are
- Where you are from
- Relevant associations

### STEP 2. STATE WHY YOU ARE THERE

- Clearly communicate your three key points early in the conversation.
- Be brief and concise, legislators are busy with legislative meetings and hearings.

### STEP 3. ASK FOR A COMMITMENT

This will look different depending on the purpose of your visit.

- If you're there to introduce yourself, then the commitment might be for a follow up meeting.
- If you have a specific issue to discuss, ask your legislator to clarify their position on that issue.

For example, you might ask if they support maintaining funding for early childhood education or another priority. Other times you may be asking your legislator to vote for or against a specific bill or to sign on as a co-sponsor.

#### STEP 4. ASK HOW YOU CAN BE OF ASSISTANCE

Even if your legislator supports your issue, they may need help convincing their colleagues to take the same position. By offering your support, you're showing commitment to the issues which deepens the relationship with your legislator.

#### STEP 5. THANK YOUR LEGISLATOR FOR HER OR HIS TIME

This is a small gesture that goes a long way.

### ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR DURING YOUR VISIT

- Don't use technical terms or acronyms.
- Don't attack your legislator or his/her record on your issues.  
Don't threaten your legislator by saying things like "I'll never vote for you again unless..."
- If you don't know something, don't be afraid to say so and follow up after your visit.
- Share a personal story that connects to the larger problem or issue. Address them appropriately, for example Representative \_\_\_\_\_ or Senator \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Be yourself:** Sincerity, honesty and a strong belief in the concepts and programs you are advocating for will come across loud and clear. *If you are passionate about an issue, you already have the most important skill needed to be an effective advocate.*

## PHASE 3: ADVOCACY AFTER THE VISIT

**SEND A THANK YOU CARD:** this is an opportunity to reaffirm any commitment your legislator makes during your meeting and to provide needed follow-up information. (We will provide thank you cards for you on the day of the event.)

**MAINTAIN COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR:** Write letters, make phone calls, and/or arrange another visit so that your issue stays at the forefront of your legislator's mind.

#### PLAN ADDITIONAL ADVOCACY ON YOUR ISSUE:

In addition to legislative visits, there are many ways to advocate on the issues that matter most to you and your family. At Speak Up for Kids we will provide a follow-up toolkit highlighting additional things you can do to increase access to early childhood development opportunities and health services for Colorado kids.



# GENERAL TIPS FOR BEING AN ADVOCATE

**BEING AN “EXPERT” IS NOT A REQUIREMENT:** The most effective advocate is one who believes in what he or she is promoting and whose sincerity and commitment to the subject are readily apparent. Your expertise and interest in children’s issues makes you a trustworthy and effective spokesperson.

**KNOW YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL AND THEIR CONTACT INFO:** Between federal, state and local level representatives, keeping track of who represents you can be difficult.

- Identify your state senator or state representative, visit [leg.colorado.gov/find-my-legislator](http://leg.colorado.gov/find-my-legislator)
- Identify federal representatives, visit [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org).
- Identify your state board of education member, visit [www.cde.state.co/cdeboard](http://www.cde.state.co/cdeboard).
- Visit your school district website to find your local school board members.

**COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS!** In order for your representatives to represent you well, they need to know what you care about.

- Write letters
- Write emails
- Call them
- Meet in person at the Capitol or in your community after the session.

**GET INVOLVED IN THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS AS EARLY AS YOU CAN:** It’s always easier to change a bill or stop something from moving on if you get involved earlier rather than later.

**NETWORK WITH OTHERS:** Your voice is amplified by others who feel the same way you do! Reach out, educate, and ask for support for your issue. Here are some individuals who may be helpful partners.

- Community leaders
- Professional Advocates
- Community members

## Review of the Legislative Process

National Politics: The U.S. government is split into three branches: Executive, Legislative and Judicial. Each is assigned a different task to separate power, creating a checks and balances system. The table below illustrates each branches main functions and key players.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT		
Comprised of the three branches outlined below		
Has the power to handle defense, trade, immigration, coining money, collecting taxes and creating laws		
Legislative Branch	Executive Branch	Judicial Branch
Congress (House and Senate)	President	Supreme Court Judges
Make laws	Signs laws into effect & manages federal departments	Ensure the other branches act constitutionally

### LEGISLATIVE



- ★ Makes laws
- ★ Approves presidential appointments
- ★ Two senators from each state
- ★ The number of congressmen is based on population

### EXECUTIVE



- ★ Signs laws
- ★ Vetoes laws
- ★ Pardons people
- ★ Appoints federal judges
- ★ Elected every four years

### JUDICIAL



- ★ Decides if laws are constitutional
- ★ Are appointed by the president
- ★ There are 9 justices
- ★ Can overturn rulings by other judges

## Colorado State and Local Government Overview

Colorado state government is broken into the same three branches as the federal government.

**The legislative branch** is made up of the 65 member House of Representatives and the 35 member Senate that collectively make up the General Assembly.

- House members are elected every two years.
- Senators are elected every four years.

In Colorado, bills are presented, heard, and decided upon during the legislative session, which last no longer than 120 days, starting in January.

**The executive branch** is led by the governor, who is elected every four years. The governor is responsible for carrying out state laws, administering the executive budget, representing the state when dealing with other states or the federal government, as well as outlining an agenda for funding state programs. The state government consists of 19 executive departments responsible for health, education, public safety, natural resources, agriculture, highways and social services.

**The judicial branch** of the Colorado government consists of a state supreme court, a state court of appeals, 22 judicial districts, county, and municipal courts. Each of these courts handles different cases depending on the level of law that a case concerns.

### WHERE YOU COME IN!

The public can propose a ballot initiative by petition or collection of signatures. Initiatives can be for constitutional amendments or changes to statutes (laws). Legislature can change a statute, but they cannot change the constitution without another vote of the people. However, a petition can get an initiative on the ballot for a vote.

# HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW



CAN START IN EITHER BODY



## COLORADO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

65 Members



Elected every 2 years

## COLORADO STATE SENATE

35 Members



Elected every 4 years



SENT TO OTHER BODY



- Bill introduced by Legislator
- Speaker sends to Committee
- Approved by Committee with any changes
- Passed by majority of full House



IF VERSIONS SAME



SENT TO GOVERNOR



- Senate President sends to Committee
- Approved by Committee with any changes
- Passed by majority of Senate



### Governor signs

- Bill becomes law



### Governor doesn't sign

- During session: bill becomes law within 10 days
- Not during session: bill becomes law within 30 days



### Governor rejects

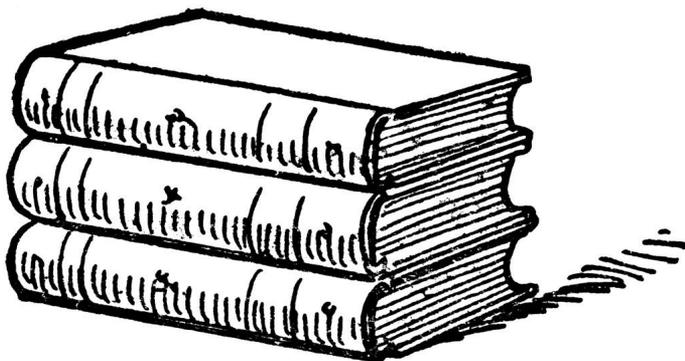
- House and Senate have to approve with 2/3 of members for bill to become law

BILL BECOMES LAW



# Recommending Reading for Grassroots Advocacy

- **“Take Back Your Government: A Citizen’s Guide to Grassroots Advocacy”**, Colorado State Senator Morgan Carroll (book)
- **“NAEYC Advocacy Toolkit”**, National Association for the Education of Young Children: [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)
- **“Early Childhood Advocacy Toolkit”**, Ounce of Prevention Fund: [www.theounce.org](http://www.theounce.org)
- **“Be A Champion for Children’s Health”**, Children’s Hospital Association and Speak Now for Kids: [www.childrenshospital.org](http://www.childrenshospital.org)
- **“You Have What It Takes! A Tool for Identifying Your Skills as an Early Childhood Advocate”**, BUILD Initiative: [www.buildinitiative.org](http://www.buildinitiative.org)



**NOTES:**



**Clayton Early Learning**

3801 Martin Luther King Blvd.

Denver, CO 80205

303-355-4411

[www.claytonearlylearning.org](http://www.claytonearlylearning.org)

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Children's Hospital Colorado

**Children's Hospital Colorado  
Child Health Champions**

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Aurora, CO 80045

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