

CONTACTING YOUR LEGISLATORS

There are so many different ways that you can communicate with your legislators to let them know what matters to you about early education. Here are some tips about how to get started. You can –

- Meet with legislators back home in the district as an individual or in a group
- Meet with legislators or their staff in Raleigh
- Make a phone call
- Write a letter or send an email

Visiting a Legislator At Home

Having a conversation with your legislators back in the district away from the distraction and demands they have in Raleigh is the probably the best way to discuss early education. Having at-home meetings can happen in several ways:

- Schedule a meeting with your legislator by calling their office to set up a time to meet over a cup of coffee, at a library or another convenient location.
- Invite legislators to come to visit you at your child care program or organization so they can learn firsthand about what you do to support young children and family. This will provide a comfortable time to talk and help your legislator gain a better understanding of the important work you do.
- Take advantage of events that are scheduled in the district to stay in touch with local legislators. Check their website or Facebook Page to see where they are hosting or attending events in your community.

Best times for meetings locally are just before or after a legislative session, or when they are not in session in Raleigh, or on the weekends when they are likely to be back in their districts.

Bring along three or four friends or co-workers and parents of the families you serve.

Visiting a Legislator's Office in Raleigh

Legislators are inundated with people who may or may not be the legislator's constituent (those who live in their home district) like paid lobbyists and people representing different organizations and groups. The legislator's schedule may vary quite a bit day to day, so call their office prior to your visit if possible and talk with their legislative assistance to determine a good time to meet. Please understand that this can change on a short notice if the legislative calendar changes. You may be able to meet with them in their office or you may have to talk with them as they are on their way to a meeting. Regardless of the circumstances, legislators will try very hard to find the time to speak

Communication Tips

- **Seek to build a relationship.** Find out something about your legislator – where they live in your community, if they have children, what type of work they do. View this as a chance to get to know them and learn more about them. Visit their website or Facebook Page to learn more.
- **Introduce yourself as a constituent.** Tell them your name, where you live and work so that they know you live in their district. Tell them something about yourself or family.
- **Be friendly and courteous at all times.** You want the legislator to listen to your point of view so stay positive and don't make it personal.
- **Be respectful and polite.** Even if your legislator disagrees with you, don't argue with them. Simply let them know what your experience is and why you wanted to talk with them. Listen as much as you speak.
- **Be brief.** You may only have 3 minutes for a phone call, or 15 minutes for a meeting. So be sure to plan ahead and have talking points to help you convey your message.
- **Let them know why you care about this issue!** How does early education affect you, or the children and families in your community? Share stories and photos and even videos.

with you because you are a constituent. If you arrive for a meeting and the legislator is unavailable, be sure to talk with the legislative assistant as they will likely communicate your message to the legislator.

Calling a Legislator

A well-timed telephone call to your legislator is very effective, especially in relation to impending votes on specific legislation. Often the time between knowing when an issue is coming up for a vote and the actual vote is a matter of one or two days, so the Coalition will often send an email action alert with a request to contact your legislator about one of our legislative issues. However, you can call your legislator's office at any time on your own as well. You can look up your legislators' phone numbers at www.ncleg.net. When you call, ask to speak to the legislator. If he or she is not available, leave a message with their legislative assistant. Include the bill number or issue you are calling about, and your position if you are seeking support or stating opposition to a particular bill. Because you are a constituent, be sure to leave your name and phone number if you leave a message, or when you speak to the staff person.

Writing or Emailing a Legislator

The power of email is not what it once was because of the volume of emails legislators often receive, but it can still be an effective way to communicate quickly with your legislator. It is more powerful when a legislator receives hundreds of emails from constituents about a specific issue, so make sure to respond to email action alerts with emails as well as phone calls, and share them with your friends! Be sure and put your message in the subject line, and keep your email as short as possible with your key points in the body of the email. Generally, do not ask them to read or download an attachment as they may not have the time to print out and read your document.

A written letter may be most helpful in describing an issue and the solution to address that issue rather than an immediate request to support or oppose a specific bill or issue. You can also include more information and resources via traditional mail. Just be sure your information is not time limited.

You can find your legislators' email and mailing addresses at www.ncleg.net. When writing a letter, use their title, Senator or Representative, and address the letter in the following way:

The Honorable (legislator's name)
North Carolina (House of Representatives or Senate)
(Office Number and Building)
Raleigh, N.C. (zip code)

Communication Tips

- **Offer to be a resource.** Don't assume your legislator knows what you do about early education. Bring or send them information to help them learn about the issues.
- **Follow up and send a thank you note.** Send a personal note thanking them for the visit and their time. It's also a good chance to include any additional materials you offered to send or provide answers to their questions. Remember many people want to talk with your legislator and you want to be sure you get to meet again.
- **Follow your legislators.** Follow them on Facebook or Twitter, sign up for their newsletters, visit their websites, and look up what Committee's they serve on, or bills that they sponsor. This will let you be more effective in your communications, and let's them know you care about their work.

Find Your Legislator

Not sure who represents you? Need an email or phone number?

Visit the NC General Assembly website
www.ncleg.net