Advocating with your Elected Officials

AREA BOARD 9 ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Acknowledgements

“I represent the people of California State Senate District 23 which includes portions of Los Angeles and Ventura counties, and in order for me to provide the very best representation in Sacramento on matters that are important to them, I need to know what they are thinking and how they feel.

I encourage all California citizens to let their local legislators know what’s on their minds, either through letters, phone calls, emails or by visiting a district office.

Direct contact with your local legislator will help make California a better place.”

Senator Fran Pavley
Senate District 23

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Thank you to our legislators
- Senator Fran Pavley
- Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee

People First of San Luis Obispo
- Jody Barker, President

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Introduction

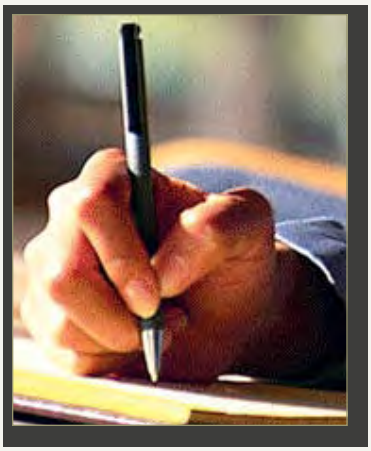
Communicating directly with elected officials about issues important to you can make a difference.

Legislators, who are elected to represent you, will never know how you feel about important matters or proposed laws, if they do not hear from you. They need to learn from you about key issues affecting your life and your community.

Contacting your elected representatives is an effective way to be heard and involved in our political process.

Meeting personally, calling and writing emails or letters are valuable ways to assure your ideas are heard. Legislators keep track of what is important to their constituents — the people they represent, regarding matters that come before the legislature. As a constituent, you may also be a source of information for your legislator.

Making visits and regular contact develops relationships with your legislators and their staff, which can be beneficial to both you and them.



This booklet will guide you when sending personal letters or emails, telephoning or meeting with your elected officials.

It also provides website links for information about legislators and proposed legislation.

Tips from Jody Barker

Jody Barker

I feel that actual face-to-face representation, people telling their personal stories, makes the strongest impression on legislators. They see a "somebody," a human being who is impacted by their decisions.

Though letters are also good, I think showing up is most important. We need to lobby not just in Sacramento, but in our own backyards.

Jody Barker

When People First of San Luis Obispo testified in Sacramento to support the Warren Mattingly Signature Stamp law, our presence had great impact. Hearing directly from us showed our state legislators the need for a law that let people with disabilities vote with privacy and dignity.

> **"The legislative process overall is most effective when you make your views known to your elected officials. I encourage you to contact your representatives and let them know how you feel about the issues affecting you."**
>
> Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee
> 33rd Assembly District

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Make a visit

Make a phone call

Send a letter

Know who they are

Find out who represents you in the state legislature. You have a member of the California State Senate and a member of the California State Assembly.

To find their names and contact information go to www.legislature.ca.gov or www.leginfo.ca.gov (see resource page in back of booklet).

> **"Through my legislative involvement, I have learned that taking time to prepare for a visit with a legislator has always helped to make it a positive and enjoyable meeting. As a parent, I have also found that sharing my thoughts and concerns regarding my own child helps when introducing issues that many families may also be facing."**
>
> Denise Filz
> Legislative Chair,
> Area Board 9 on
> Developmental Disabilities

Learn about your legislator

Your legislators learn about the needs of the community by hearing from you, their constituents, through meetings, calls, letters and emails. *Constituents live in the district the legislator represents.*

Before contacting your legislators it is helpful to learn about their legislative interests and positions on proposed laws.

Most legislators have web pages and many have an email list you can join. Other websites (see back of booklet) also help you find out more about legislators' positions on issues and how they voted on proposed laws.

Proposed Laws

This bill would provide, in addition, that a person with a disability, as defined, who, by reason of the disability, is unable to write may use a signature stamp, or authorize another person to use the stamp, to serve as his or her signature for any purpose specified in the Elections Code. The bill would require that a signature affixed with a signature stamp pursuant to these provisions be treated in the same manner as a signature made in writing and would authorize a signature stamp to be used as a mark, as specified. It would impose certain conditions on the use of signature stamps, including a condition that the signature stamp be used in the presence of the Secretary of State, local elections officials, or their designees to obtain a ballot.

A proposed law or bill is assigned a number with the author's name (*example: AB100, Jones – Assembly Bill 100 by Assemblymember Maria Jones*). With this information and using the website www.leginfo.ca.gov (see back of booklet) you can get to know about the bill, where it is in the legislative process, and how your legislator voted on it.

You can also call your legislators' offices to find out how they voted.

Do your Research

Before contacting your legislators, plan what you want to share and how you will present it. With proposed legislation (*a bill*) that you support or oppose, find out as much about it as you can.

Tips:

1. If you are concerned about funding cuts to a program, learn about the program and proposed cuts before you make your contact.
2. If you plan to talk about particular legislation, identify it by the bill number and author.
3. Make sure you know what the legislation proposes and how it will affect you and people you know.

Preparing Your Issues

It is important to share your ideas and concerns, but make sure you support them with facts. Describe how you and the community you represent will be impacted.

In support of your position, you can also suggest an alternative proposal for your legislator to consider.

Example:

"I'm against the proposal to cut $10 million from the employment assistance program. The cut would eliminate 150 jobs for newly employed people in your Senate District, based on statistics from the Employment Development Department.

I know that we need to reduce spending in this year's budget, but I believe millions can be saved by cutting back on travel, new furniture and other administrative costs."

Setting your Appointment

Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee with members of People First of San Luis Obispo

"As an elected representative, it is important that I hear from the people of my district. When you contact me and share your opinion or ideas with me, I am able to more effectively represent you."

Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee
33rd Assembly District

You can phone or email your legislator's office to request a meeting. Often, you are asked to provide a short summary of your issue and purpose of your visit.

Mention how many people will be with you when requesting the visit.

Be clear, specific and ask for no more than15–20 minutes.

If you don't receive a return call or email right away, don't be discouraged. Wait a week or so and try again.

Be patient, polite and persistent.

Getting ready

If you are with a group, bring no more than four members. Select a spokesperson. It helps when one person begins the conversation and is a contact for your group, as legislators (or their staff) may want more information later.

After doing research about your issues, make sure all group members understand what will be shared. As a courtesy:

- Plan your presentation to be no more than 15–20 minutes.
- Rehearse your presentation, keeping it brief and focused.
- Allow time for legislators (and/or their staff members) to respond and for them to ask questions.
- Be flexible when planning your time for the visit, meetings may be longer or shorter.

Don't forget to dress appropriately and speak respectfully. Your issues are very important and should be represented professionally.

Your Visit

Identify someone to take notes during the meeting, including questions or suggestions from your legislator (and/or staff members) that require your follow-up.

Be on time and stay on your topic. If you are the person receiving services or a family member, give examples of how you are affected personally. Bring materials that summarize your issues, and any that describe your organization. Plan to leave copies along with your business card.

Don't be discouraged if you meet with a member of your legislator's staff. They often help determine what topics are brought to a busy legislator's attention. In some cases, staff members may be better informed about your issue than the senator or assemblymember.

Be professional and polite. Thank the legislator (and/or staff members) for the visit. A thank-you email or letter is also a good idea.

Tips for a Successful Visit

1. Assign tasks to group members to be fully prepared. (Calling, emailing, letters, research, note taking.)

2. Be professional and courteous.

3. Offer to provide information and show you want to work together to find solutions.

4. If from a group, invite your legislator (or staff member) to attend a meeting.

5. Leave copies of summary materials and your contact information.

6. Follow up on anything you promised to do or provide.

7. Keep track of how your legislator votes or other matters related to your visit.

8. Send a thank you note.

Your call

A phone call is another valuable way to communicate with your legislator, especially if there isn't time to schedule a visit or send a letter or email.

During your call, identify yourself, state your position and allow the legislator or staff member time to respond. You will probably speak with a staff member.

- With proposed legislation, identify it by the bill number and author.
- Always be prepared and clear.
- Like visits, keep your conversation brief and focused.
- Be respectful and leave your contact information. They may want to call you back or send an email.

Generally, the legislator's staff member will make a note of your position. In some cases they may want more information, like reasons why you oppose or support a bill or issue. They may ask you to send an email reflecting your concerns. If you don't have access to a computer, let them know.

Your letter or email

Letters or emails are also useful ways to communicate with legislators.

Like a visit, keep letters and emails brief but describe how you will be affected. If you are concerned about proposed legislation, identify it by bill number and author. Be polite and identify yourself with your contact information. Avoid using form letters and emails because they are not considered as meaningful as personal contact.

Sometimes, when a legislative committee hearing or vote is about to take place, a personal email may be the fastest way to make contact.

Good (basic information)

"Dear Assemblymember Garcia:

I want to share my opposition to AB100, by Assemblymember Jones. This bill would result in a loss of services that are critical to my son living independently in the community. Please vote note on AB100.

Thank you for your consideration."

Name

Contact Information

Better (basic information and personal details)

"Dear Assemblymember Garcia,

As parents of an individual with developmental disabilities, my husband and I want to share our concern about AB100, by Assemblymember Jones.

AB100 will be heard at the Assembly Appropriations Committee on May 10. If passed, it would reduce funding for a program that is very important to our son living as independently as possible in the community.

We urge you to vote no on AB100, and suggest budget savings can be made in other ways: cutting administrative costs, not reducing direct services to people.

Thank you for your consideration. Please don't hesitate to contact me, if you have any questions."

Name

Contact Information

Keep it up

To be more effective, your senator or assemblymember needs to hear from you on a regular basis, particularly when there are critical issues before legislature.

Don't be discouraged if your legislator votes against something you supported. Be ready to repeat the preparation process for the next time you visit. You can also call or write emails and letters. Politics and creating legislation is unpredictable. You never know when your issues might be the same as those of your legislator. But if you don't contact them to express your views, they will never know.

Remember, creating an on-going relationship is helpful.

As you visit and/or send letters or e-mails you get to know the interests of your legislator and they get to know yours.

You can track the progress of a bill at www.leginfo.ca.gov (see back of booklet). It is helpful to know how your legislator votes, especially if you plan more contact in the future.

If your legislator votes in favor of something you support, send a brief email or letter of thanks. It is important that your legislators know that you follow their voting record.

Legislators

Members of the California Assembly or Senate. Each legislator represents a part of California called a district and each district is numbered.

Legislature

The Senate and the Assembly, with 80 members in the Assembly and 40 members in the Senate. They are elected officials who pass laws and determine the state budget. Every Californian lives in a specific Senate and Assembly District, and is represented by one Assemblymember and one Senator.

Bill

A proposed law or change to an existing law.

Constituents

People represented by a legislator. For example: if you live in the district represented by Assemblymember Jones, you are one of her constituents.

Form letter or email

Pre-written letter that you only need to sign. Not as useful as a personal letter.

Link	Description
www.scdd.ca.gov	California State Council on Developmental Disabilities
www.cdcan.us	California Disability Community Action Network
www.disabilityrightsca.org	Disability Rights California
www.scdd.ca.gov/Area_Board/Area_Board_9.htm	Area Board 9
www.legislature.ca.gov	California State Legislature
www.leginfo.ca.gov	California legislative information
www.assembly.ca.gov	California Assembly
www.senate.ca.gov	California Senate

Tear Off Work Sheet

(1) Your Elected Officials

Name _____

Contact Info _____

_____

Staff member _____

Contact info _____

(2) Your Issues

What do you support/oppose?

_____

_____

Bill number and author

_____

(3) Why do you support/oppose (be brief and focused)

Impact (personal story, work experience, or official position)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Recommendations/suggestions

_____

_____

Answers to questions you might be asked

_____

_____

_____

_____

Checklists

Making a Visit

1. Do your homework, know your issue(s) and elected official(s)
2. Schedule the visit
3. Practice your presentation, be focused and brief
4. Bring materials to share
5. Be professional and polite
6. Answer questions and offer assistance
7. Send thank you

Making a Phone Call

1. Know your issue(s)
2. Practice your message: be direct and focused
3. Identify yourself, affiliation and experience
4. Be professional and polite

Sending a Letter or Email

1. Write your message – be focused and to the point
2. Identify yourself, affiliation and experience
3. Be professional and polite
4. Send thank you

Track Progress

Let your legislator know you follow bills and their performance. Send an email or letter of thanks if they vote in favor of your issue.