



# Advocacy Training



Early  
Learning  
Coalition of Duval

*Toolkit*

# Advocacy Toolkit

## Overview

The Advocacy Toolkit is designed to serve as a resource for building a structured approach for advocacy for the Early Learning Coalition of Duval. The Advocacy Toolkit provides a broadly accepted definition of advocacy and underscores ELC's position and experience in advocacy.

Advocacy is a very large topic. So, it is important to remember that this is just one set of tools, and there is not one particular method or approach that should be attributed to advocacy.

The Toolkit is broken up into 5 different sections:

1. Advocacy Basics: What is advocacy and why is it important?
2. Legislative Process.
3. Conducting a successful meeting.
4. Best practices of advocacy.
5. Resources.



# Advocacy Basics

## What is Advocacy?

**Advocacy** is building support for an issue among audiences such as the general public, elected officials, the media, and key opinion leaders. As child advocates, we work to ensure the children in our communities have a voice and their needs are met. We can do this by voting, talking to legislators about our concerns, speaking up at community meetings or writing letters and/or emails.

Most important, advocacy is a frame of mind - not just a job title, occupation, or role in life. Advocates see opportunities where others see obstacles.

## Why is Advocacy Important?



The goal of early childhood advocacy is to improve the lives of children and families by influencing legislators' and policymakers' opinions and activities. To carry out their responsibilities, public officials require and welcome the advice that well-informed people, like you, provide.

Advocates can educate decision-makers and suggest policies that would benefit their community. We want our local, state, and federal policymakers to act in ways that support children and families. To do this effectively, it is important to have a sustained and vocal presence at all levels of decision-making.



# Legislative Process

## Overview

The three major branches of state government consist of the Florida Legislature, the Governor of Florida and the Florida Supreme Court. An understanding of the structure is critically important when working with legislators.

1. **Legislative Branch** - The Legislative Branch establishes laws and determines general policies of the state. It consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate. A breakdown of the Florida legislative branch includes:
  - House of Representatives (120 Members)  
Term of Office: 2 years / Term Limit: 8 years  
Presiding Officer: Speaker of the House
  - The Senate (40 Members)  
Term of Office: 4 years / Term Limit: 8 years  
Presiding Officer: President of the Senate
2. **Executive Branch** - The Executive Branch administers the laws and makes policy recommendations to the Legislature. A breakdown of the Florida Cabinet and term restrictions include:
  - Governor - Limited to 2 consecutive, 4-year terms
  - Secretary of State - Unlimited 4-year terms
  - Attorney General - Unlimited 4-year terms
  - Comptroller - Unlimited 4-year terms
  - Treasurer - Unlimited 4-year terms
  - Commissioner of Agriculture - Unlimited 4-year terms
  - Commissioner of Education - Unlimited 4-year terms
3. **Judicial Branch** - The Judicial Branch interprets the laws and applies the Constitution. It consists of the Supreme Court, the 5 District Court of Appeals, 20 Circuit Courts and 67 County Courts. A breakdown of the Judicial Branch includes:
  - Supreme Court - 7 Justices, Highest Court
  - District Court of Appeals - 5 Districts, Circuit Court Appeals
  - Circuit Court - 20 Circuits (hears civil and criminal cases)
  - County Court - 67 Courts (generally handles non-jury trials)



# Legislative Process

## How a Bill Becomes Law

1. Legislation is introduced by a Senator or Representative, in his/her chamber, and is then given a reference number.
2. The bill passes on to any relevant committee or committees within that chamber, depending on the topic of the legislation.
3. The committee(s) holds hearings and assigns the bill to subcommittees if necessary.
4. The committee(s) discusses the bill and debates potential changes.
5. The committee(s) votes on the bill, and if passed by a majority, it then moves to the full chamber.
6. The bill is heard and debated in the chamber and may be put up for a vote.
7. Once the bill passes a majority vote in both chambers, it moves to the Executive Office to be signed into law by the Governor.

Timing is very important. The most effective time to advocate for your issues is close to a vote or legislative hearing. If the issue you are concerned about is imminent, contacting your legislator quickly by phone or e-mail can be very effective.



# Legislature

## Conducting a Successful Meeting


Developing a personal, ongoing relationship with your elected officials is the most effective way to secure lawmakers' support on children's issues. You can build these relationships through phone calls, emails, and in-person meetings.

When meeting with your Senator or Representative, remember to:

- **Be On Time.** Be respectful of the legislator (and staff) and arrive on time.
- **Bring the "Right Messengers".** Prior to the meeting, you should agree on what is to be discussed and stick to these talking points. Review your organizations' handouts, so everyone delivers the same message and speaks the same language.
- **Be Clear about the Message.** Be sure to introduce yourself and your colleagues and explain exactly why you are concerned about the issue. Be concise, polite and professional.
- **Be Prepared.** Anticipate opposing arguments. Be prepared to defend your perspective and stay focused on suggestions for constructive solutions. Bring information materials, such as fact sheets, articles, and/or research studies to leave with the legislator and staff.
- **Engage in the Conversation.** Allow the elected official time to ask questions and share observations or opinions.

Legislators want to be responsive to their constituents and their needs, but often have very little time to discuss complex issues. The EPIC format, trademarked by the advocacy organization RESULTS ([www.results.org](http://www.results.org)), is a useful way to create a concise but powerful statement.

### Always Remember to be E.P.I.C.

- **Engage** the audience - Use a short opening sentence that grabs the listener's attention.
  - State the **Problem** - Present the causes and/or severity of the problem.
  - **Inform** about Potential Solutions - Present your solution with reasons why it will work.
  - **Call** to Action - Ask for a specific action.
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# Best Practices Advocacy

**Developing a relationship.** Get to know your elected officials and the heads of the government agencies that affect your community. They can supply you with valuable information if they know you are on their side.

**Be credible.** Make sure you are well briefed and you have data, evidence and personal stories to support your decision/side.

**Be clean about the message.** Make each message simple and direct. Be precise and tell your legislator exactly what action you want them to take.

**Build alliances.** Align your organization with others who support your issues. Join committees and coalitions that are already lobbying in areas that affect the community. Acknowledge and award those legislators who help your cause.

## Do's and Don'ts

- **DO'S**

- ⇒ **Dress professionally.** Wear neat, modest clothing and comfortable shoes, respectful of the Florida State Capitol.
- ⇒ **Say "Thank You."** Always thank the legislator for his/her service, but remind him/her that you will also stay in touch.
- ⇒ **Send additional materials.** Leave behind a business card, fact sheet, etc.
- ⇒ **Follow Up.** Be proactive and responsive. Follow up your meeting with a "Thank You Letter" that outlines the topics discussed and reiterate any commitments your legislator made.

- **DON'TS**

- ⇒ **Don't be angry or rude.** Don't argue if they disagree with your position. Listen respectfully and keep the door open to future communication. Also, remember the legislators' aides are their "keepers." Always be courteous.
- ⇒ **Don't have too much information.** Precision is key, not volume. Don't overwhelm them.
- ⇒ **Don't be dishonest.** If you don't know they answer to a question, admit it... but let him/her know that you will get the answer and call or write back with the information.
- ⇒ **Don't visit alone.** There is power in numbers. Go with others to help even out the power differences.







# Duval Delegation

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