



Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month Toolkit

CONTACTING YOUR LEGISLATORS

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month is a great time to reach out to your elected officials! Hearing the needs and concerns of their constituents is of the utmost importance to elected officials and who better than you to share your story?

When you decide to advocate, it is important to consider your audience. While it may be tempting to send out a mass e-mail or letter to all or many elected officials, only the legislators who represent your area will respond to what you have to say.

Things to Remember when Corresponding with Your Legislators:

- Always be polite. You are less likely to receive a response to rude or profane letters.
- Be as concise as possible. Remember that each Legislator has dozens of legislative issues to cover and hundreds of constituent requests each day.
- Include your home or work address in every letter, even in e-mails.
- Thank them for taking the time to read your letter.
- Remember that correspondence with any elected official is about building an ongoing relationship and persuading them to think of you as a resource. Even if an elected official does not agree with your point of view on an issue today, they might in the future.
- Be sincere, tell YOUR Story.

Identify your Florida Legislators <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/FindYourRepresentative>

E-mails are the most effective form of communication when contacting a Legislator's office. Many offices now have standard e-mail forms that can be accessed right from the "Contact" tab of the myfloridahouse.gov website. A letter sent through the post office can take weeks to reach an office. However, if you email that same letter, the office will receive it immediately. This is especially important when what you are advocating for is time-sensitive; the best example of this is when you are asking a legislator to vote a certain way on an upcoming bill.

E-Mail Tips:

- Keep your letter as concise as possible. Some e-mails can be as short as a single paragraph urging them to vote a certain way or to advocate for a certain issue, but letters up to three paragraphs are effective.
- Make sure the important information contained in your e-mail jumps out. You can do this by putting what action you are requesting in the subject line (ex: YES on H.B. 3). Even if the member or his/her staff does not take the time to read your letter in its entirety, they will still have received the message that one of their constituents feels a certain way about an issue.

Calling your elected official is also an effective way to advocate, especially when an important vote is coming up.

Tips for Calling Your Elected Officials:

- Make sure to prepare beforehand for your call. If there is a certain piece of legislation you would like them to vote on, know what the specific Bill number is (e.g., H.B. 2).
- Identify yourself as one of the member's constituents.
- Explain to the staff member what it is you are calling about and what action you would like the member to take (e.g., voting Yes or No on a piece of legislation).
- Feel free to briefly share any relevant research, data, and/or stories that you might have with the staff member. This will go a long way in your relationship building with your congressional office. You want them to think of you as a resource when it comes to education issues.
- Try to illustrate the connection between the legislation being voted on to the effects it will have in your community. This will help bring the point home to the member and provide further encouragement for their office to take your requests and concerns seriously.
- Because legislative offices are extremely busy, it is important to be as concise and brief as possible to be effective. While you might feel that explaining the minutiae of a bill to the staff member will be helpful, this will only frustrate whomever you are talking to and will likely not help your cause.
- Be as congenial and polite as possible. Staff members are overwhelmed with angry phone calls, letters, and faxes daily; being pleasant and easy to talk to will go a long way in getting your voice heard.
- Be aware and respectful of the fact that the staff member may not have in-depth knowledge about the issue or specific legislation you are calling to discuss. There are thousands of bills introduced each year, so be mindful of this fact and do not be discouraged if they are not familiar with the issue or legislation.
- Always thank the staff member for taking the time to talk with you.