

# Legislative Outreach



*Our voices can be powerful tools for change.*



**Legislators need to hear our voices to do their jobs effectively.** QUEST, in partnership with the DVAEYC Public Policy Program, is inviting early childhood programs statewide to reach out to their local legislators concerning important early care and education issues:

- PreK
- Keystone STARS
- Education and Retention Awards
- T.E.A.C.H.
- Maximum Child Care Allowances (Reimbursement Rates)

Early childhood professionals can share information with their local legislator about the everyday challenges they face in providing quality early care and education. Representatives from a center or home-based program (Director/or Provider, teacher, and parent), with support from local advocates, can participate by building ongoing relationships with their local legislators through visits and communications.

We are able to guide you through the whole process—from identifying your local legislator to identifying advocates in your community who may be able to accompany you on your actual visit. We are able to provide information and support that will help that will help you prepare for your visit. An informational packet is available for you to present to your legislator at the time of your visit. We will be there to support you every step of the way.

**Isn't it time you stepped forward for children, families and child care workers?**

**Think about it...you can make a difference!**



**Here is an opportunity for your voice to be heard.**

- Imagine...a director/or home-based provider speaking out about how valuable their program is to the community and how hard it is to recruit and retain staff.*
- Imagine...a parent raving about the quality of their child care and the financial struggles they face in paying for it.*
- Imagine...a teacher explaining how she loves her work but cannot afford to stay in a field that does not pay a living wage.*
- Imagine...an advocate explaining how current legislation or budget issues will affect child care quality, affordability and accessibility in their district and how critical it is that we receive their legislator's support.*

**Collectively, our voices will be powerful tools for change. Join us!**

As you begin your legislative outreach, it is important for you to know that state legislators make voting decisions based on their perception of what is important to their constituents. Their perception of their constituents views often depend on who they hear from, how often they are contacted and how persuasive the facts are that are brought to their attention. That is why it is so important for your team to bring your information, thoughts and feelings to your legislator's attention. Your presence will "humanize" the issue. It will connect the issue with faces and illustrate its importance. Above all, remember that you do not need to be an expert in order to express your opinion. But you do need to be well prepared. The following tips and enclosures will help you in planning the visit with your legislator and establishing a working relationship that will enable you to keep in touch as new issues and legislation come up.



## MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

- ✓ **MAKE AN APPOINTMENT** by calling your legislator's district office. Ask to speak with the scheduler. You may meet at the district office or your program. Identify yourself and your program as one existing in the district. Be clear about the topic you want to discuss, how much time you think it will take and how many people are coming.
- ✓ **PREPARE YOUR AGENDA** and delegate parts of the presentation. Be clear about what you want to achieve. You may prepare a short, clear statement to explain how the issue, bill, or budget affects you and your program. You may address what will happen if the desired outcome is not achieved. Each member of the team will bring a personal perspective to the issue.
- ✓ **BE PREPARED** by bringing printed materials that support your position or issues. Fact sheets that include data, examples or statistics are vital. Information about your program, including number of children/or families served, number of staff employed, weekly tuition costs for child care or significant program budget information personalizes the statistics. If possible, learn about your legislator's position on the issues before the meeting takes place.
- ✓ **BE STRAIGHTFORWARD.** Anticipate your legislator's concerns or questions (i.e. "Mothers should be home caring for children.") and be ready to answer some of them. If you cannot answer a question, let your legislator know that you will get back with an answer. Be sure to follow up after the meeting with the information.
- ✓ **DON'T BE INTIMIDATED.** Meeting your legislator can sometimes be intimidating. Try not to let it be. It is important for them to know what you think and to hear your experiences. Remember, they represent you.
- ✓ **THANK THE LEGISLATOR.** Send a follow-up letter thanking your legislator for his/her time. Include any other materials that you think may be helpful as well as any information that was requested. Make sure to ask to be kept informed about his/her position on the issues or legislation. Make the point that you will be staying in touch to develop and maintain a good working relationship!



## IDEAS FOR MATERIALS TO TAKE TO THE LEGISLATIVE VISIT

To make the visit more personal, you may want to consider bringing some materials that reflect your work with young children or represent your profession as an early childhood educator. You may choose from the following:

- A documentation panel showing children in your program learning through play. Using the resource: "When I.....I am learning....." to document children's work.
- Children's artwork, such as a drawing, sculpture, or structure that may be accompanied by a written documentation of the child's thoughts, reflections, and description of the work.
- Children's written work – letters, journal, or a paragraph on a specific topic – favorite activity, thoughts about their teachers, a recent field trip, etc.
- A photo album containing pictures of children in your program. They could be involved in specific learning activities, socializing, or just hamming it up for the camera. Or, one large photo (8 x 10).
- A parent's receipt for a month of child care, a teacher's pay stub, or the director's calculation of the "true cost of care" or a "turnover log" documenting the cost of turnover (forms available from DVAEYC).
- A copy of the Worthy Wage Video – ***Ready or Not, Here We Come: Voices of Child Care Workers*** – a documentary on the status of work in the child care field and what needs to happen for early childhood teachers and providers to improve their work situation.
- A child of the visiting parent - if the parent is comfortable with the child accompanying them and the child is comfortable coming with the parent.
- A packet for the legislator to peruse at his/her convenience. Choose materials carefully. Less is better. They will be more likely to read a few well-written pieces than a compilation of everything that's ever been written on child care. Think about including the following:
  1. A brochure from your program
  2. A recent newsletter or annual report
  3. Fact sheets
  4. One or two good press clippings
  5. Relevant article from ***Young Children*** or DVAEYC's ***Connection***
  6. A button or sticker

## FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR



To solidify your impact on your legislator, you should do the following after the meeting:

- Send a brief thank you note. In the note, reiterate the most important points discussed. Include any additional information or materials promised.
- At critical points during the legislative process remind your legislator, using letters and phone calls, of commitments he or she made.
- Watch your legislator to determine what action he or she took, how they voted, etc., and follow-up with a thank you indicating you have followed their actions.
- Using the phone, mail, email, or personal delivery, incorporate some of the following ideas to stay connected, on a regular basis, with your legislator:
  - Newsletter from Program
  - Invitation to a Center Function
  - Note/Letter
  - Photo
  - Artwork
  - Copy of a Letter of Appreciation from Parent
  - Breakfast/Lunch Invitation
  - Send pertinent articles – newspaper or magazine
  - Refer to TV or Radio Report or Coverage of Event
  - Share Good News – Accreditation, Awards, Media Coverage