

## **Public Policy Advocacy Three Basic Tools, Two Critical Audiences**

No matter what the level of government, the nature of the change desired or the need, there are three basic tools available to every policy advocate and two key audiences. When you want to reach a *policy maker*, you should plan to:

### ***Write • Call • Visit***

If **policy makers** are to represent your wishes in the policy process, they need to hear from you.

- Be brief and to the point. Identify yourself and how you (or people you know) will be affected by what's being proposed—that is, a new law or policy, a cut in the budget, a change in the rules that govern a program.
- Be clear about what you want. Name the law or policy that's being discussed or the program rules that are about to be changed and specify what actions you want the policy maker to take.
- Mention provisions that you agree and disagree with and, if possible, offer some alternatives.
- Let them know how you can be reached for further information, a clarification or help. Be courteous and reliable. Do not promise what you cannot deliver in terms of help or information. Finally, send a thank you note succinctly summarizing your meeting.

In addition to reaching policy makers directly, there's a second audience to keep in mind: other voters. If enough of them become interested, they will help make your case and your job will be easier. The same basic tools apply.

Write With a few minor changes, the letter or e-mail you send to a legislator or policy-maker can also be sent as a letter-to-the-editor, op-ed, Facebook or blog post. That way your message may reach many other voters.

Call The same message you leave on your elected official's answering machine can be called in to a radio show or pitched as a story to a reporter.

Visit Take the ninety second speech you memorized to speak to the elected official the other day and repeat it at your Sisterhood meeting, mah jongg group, town hall meeting, etc. to further build awareness and garner support.

### **Democracy is not a spectator sport. Active citizens do make a difference!**

Visit the [www.ncjw.org](http://www.ncjw.org) *Take Action* tab for many advocacy resources and to sign-up for action alerts. Visit [www.ncjwcns.org](http://www.ncjwcns.org) to sign-up for Illinois action alerts and section news and events.

# **Making Your Voice Heard**

## **How You Can Influence Government Decisions**

Advocacy is the process by which you can make your voice heard on behalf of the issues that matter most. Speaking out on important issues is a critical part of the democratic process. Policy makers count on ideas and information from their constituents, using that input to form laws and policies. If you think a proposal misses the mark or a new law is needed, share your ideas.

### **Being Informed and Involved.**

It is essential to keep informed. Getting the basic facts is the first step and not very hard. Sign up for the mailing list of an advocacy group that focuses on your issue. Go to public meetings where needs are discussed. Attending school board or county zoning board meetings before your issue goes on the agenda is time well-spent. You will better understand how the decision-making process works and be much more effective in your efforts to influence policymakers. Local advocacy groups or individuals can direct you to reports on the subject, and you can follow the issue in the media.

### **Do Your Homework. Anticipate opposing arguments.**

Always use facts; don't exaggerate. Never give inaccurate information. Credibility is a strong asset, so always tell the truth. Anticipate the questions policymakers are likely to have on your topic, including "What's the fiscal impact?" Anticipate your opposition's arguments and be prepared to respond.

### **Be Concise. Practice brevity!**

Always be prepared with a brief (90-second) "speech" - one that specifies your issue, the bill or budget item you care about and what you want done.

While credibility is in large part established by actions taken with honesty and accuracy, it is also a function of patience and commitment...perhaps best described as "being in it for the long haul." Effective public policy advocacy consists of the continuing search for opportunities to move your priorities forward.

## **Public Policy Advocacy Patience and persistence. Be in it for the long haul.**

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**[www.ncjwcns.org](http://www.ncjwcns.org) sign up for action alerts**

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