

# Health Care Provider Advocacy

Grant Syverson, MD, FAAP  
NDAAP Legislative Liasion

1

## Public Policy & Children's Health

- Local, state, and federal governments have processes for enacting and changing the public policies and laws that affect children's health.
- Public policy refers to a rule, guideline, or framework and can be defined broadly.
- Public policy is what government, together with advocates, chooses to do or not to do. This can happen at the local, state, or federal level.
- These public policies, bills, and regulations are enacted at the local, state, or federal level.

2

## The Top 10 Reasons For Pediatricians to Advocate

1. Uses Your Expertise
  - Pediatricians contribute necessary expertise on children's health and development issues to policy discussions to help influence the decision-making process. Moreover, pediatricians are trusted by families to speak on behalf of children's needs.
2. Builds long-term success
  - Recruiting and engaging more pediatricians to advocacy ensures that you can keep fighting on children's health issues until real change is achieved.
3. Fuels a sense of energy and community
  - Advocacy creates a sense of energy, excitement, and momentum that gives children's health and pediatrics the attention of leaders and elected officials.
4. Influences policy
  - Pediatricians can affect policy decisions by raising awareness and educating decision-makers who can change the rules to further support children's health.
5. Impacts elections
  - Pediatricians can help persuade others in their community to vote with children's health in mind

3

## The Top 10 Reasons For Pediatricians to Advocate

6. Offers an antidote to cynicism
  - Advocacy taps into the hopes and inspiration of pediatricians' personal experiences and translates them into meaningful change on a larger scale.
7. Shows strength in numbers
  - Advocacy can help attract other pediatricians, child advocates, teachers, and parents who care about children's health because they will be drawn to the energy, enthusiasm, and positive results that they see as you speak out.
8. Creates Change
  - Advocacy has been proven to elevate children's health and well-being in the community, state, and national consciousness and create systemic change.
9. Translates Experiences
  - Compelling issues from people who are willing to tell their stories are the key components of effective advocacy. Pediatricians have the issues, stories, and expertise that decision-makers need to hear. Advocacy allows you to use these to good advantage.
10. Renews Commitment
  - Advocacy relies on the passion and experiences of pediatricians and thereby renews commitment to the improvement of child health and offers a powerful way to spread a message and influence a system

4

## Why be an advocate?

### The Pediatrician Voice

- **You have a powerful voice and are the expert on children's health**
- You are the expert on what children need. No one can represent them better than you.
- Policymakers should know you aren't advocating for your own interests, but rather for those of the patients you care for.
- Your stories and those of your patients can humanize big picture policies in a way policymakers cannot.
- Offer to serve as a resource for busy legislators.
  - Keep them updated on child health issues they care about but might otherwise miss, as well as answer any questions they have.
  - You can also provide first-hand information about how these issues affect your patients.
- You can help the public understand what's going on and how it connects to child health and related advocacy issues.

### **AAP**

- Credibility: With your training and credentials, you're already a well-respected member of your community. And as a member of the AAP, you're also part of the country's leading voice for child health. AAP's evidence-based policy proposals can further support your advocacy.
- Power in numbers: Advocacy is a team effort. Through the AAP, you can lean on the support of thousands of members across the nation. No one can turn a policy proposal into a law all by themselves — but together, we can.

5

## Making a Difference

- You don't have to be a legislative expert to effect change.
- Decision-makers do not necessarily have health or medical backgrounds and need to hear from people who do.
- **Opportune times to weigh-in:**
  - during committee hearings
  - before key votes
  - during the budget process—when budget is being created by executive branch and when being adopted by legislative branch
  - before a bill reaches the governor's desk
- **Decision-makers that need to hear from you include:**
  - your own decision-maker(s)
  - committee members and conference committee members
  - governors and other members of the executive branch

6

## Making a Difference

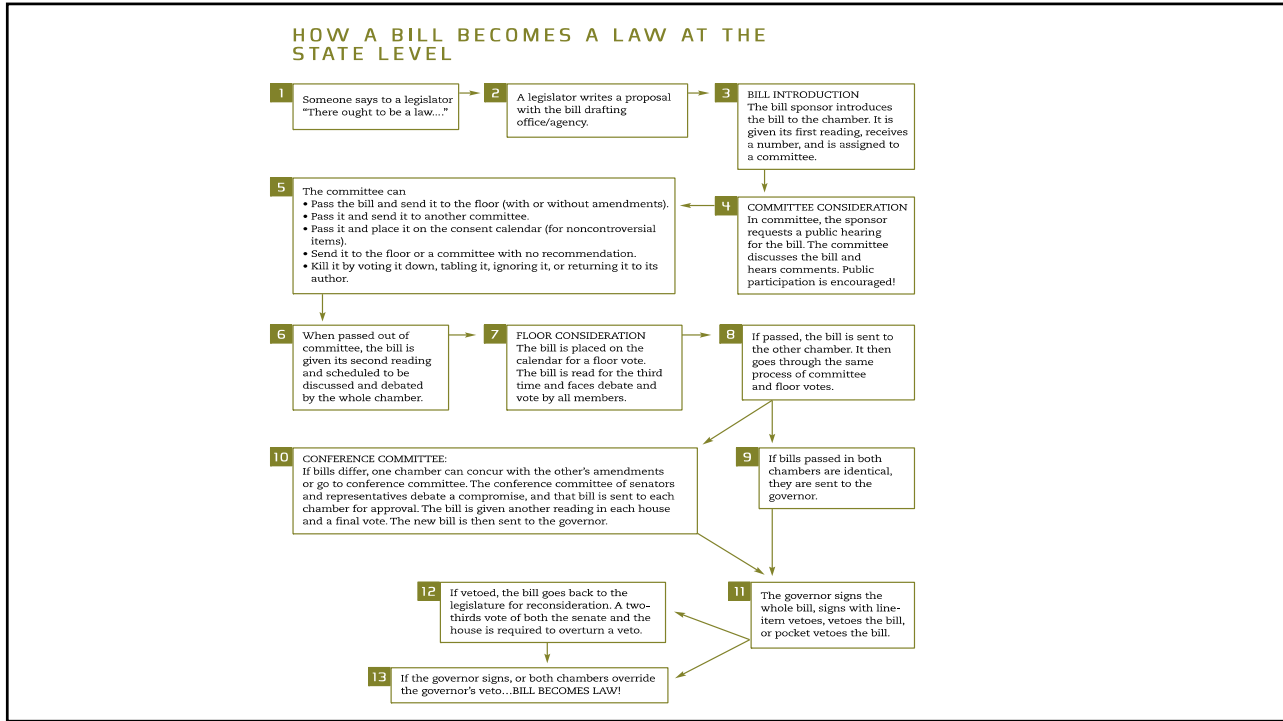
- Regardless of whether you are reaching out to your elected official through an e-mail, letter, phone call, or meeting, keep in mind the following:
  - establish your credibility as a professional and your interest as a constituent
  - make your contact personal
  - tell your story
  - include a concrete or “direct” ask in your communication
  - thank them follow up and make repeated contact

7

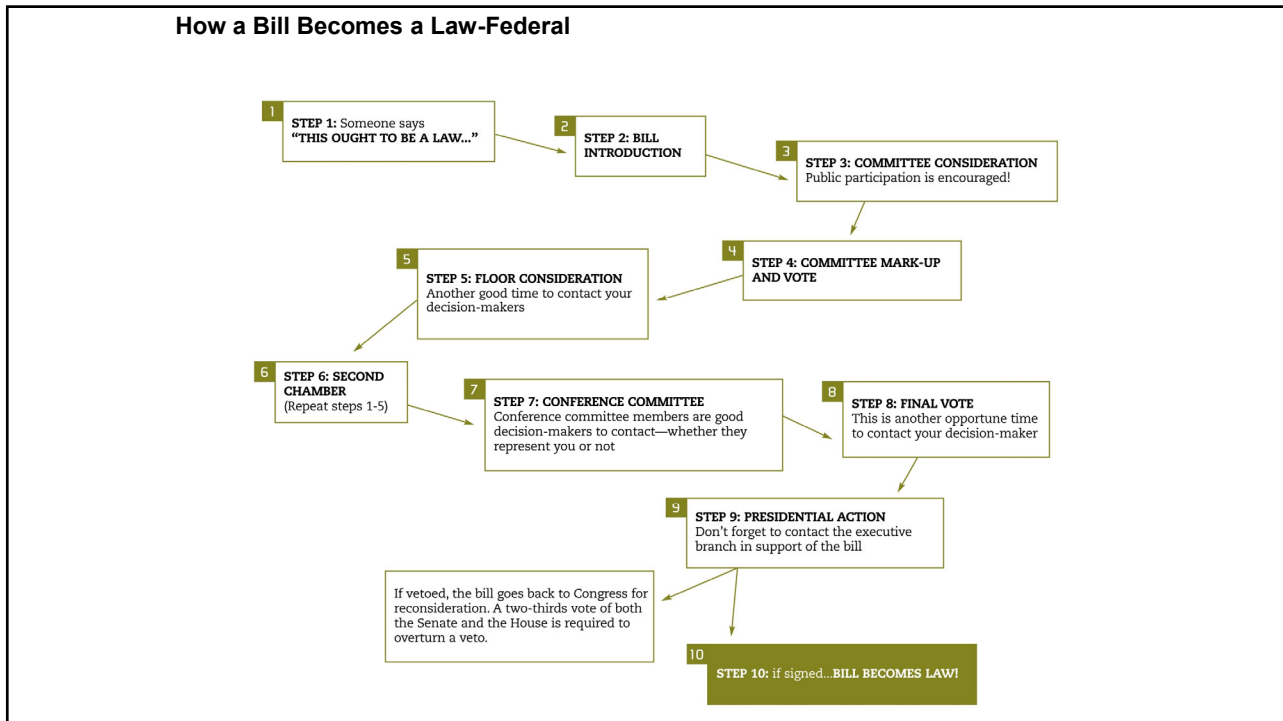
## Influencing Decision-Makers

- Decision-makers are influenced by personal contact and communication.
- There are many different ways to influence a decision-maker to act on behalf of a children’s health issue.
- When choosing how you want to contact your decision-maker, keep in mind that **the more personal you can make your communication, the better.**

8



9



10

## Fitting Advocacy into Your Busy Schedule

- Your work caring for children is incredibly important and time-consuming — and making room for advocacy might feel impossible. The good news? No matter your calendar, you can meaningfully contribute to the conversation.

Check out some simple ways to integrate advocacy into your daily routine.

- **If you have five minutes**, you might spend it thinking about a patient story that particularly stands out to you. Was the health issue preventable? How did you help? What was the outcome?
- **If you have 30 minutes**, consider something a bit more involved. You could set up Google news alerts with key words on child health, contribute to online conversations via social media, or contact your elected officials about your issue. Consider keeping a Post-It note with your legislators office number on your desk for easy access.
- **If you have an hour**, you could draft an op-ed or letter to the editor for your local paper, or host a lunchtime “how-to” advocacy presentation.
- **If you have a day**, you might attend advocacy training, testify in a legislative hearing, or be “Doctor of the Day” at the state capital
- **Over time**, you can schedule meetings with policymakers, develop relationships with them, and help your fellow pediatricians jumpstart their advocacy journeys.

11

## Fitting Advocacy into Your Busy Schedule

### In less than an hour a month

- Vote
- Call, e-mail, or write a letter to your decision-makers on behalf of a children’s health issue that is important to you.
- Contribute to a political campaign or a nonprofit advocacy organization that focuses on children’s health issues.
- Sign up for 1 or 2 e-mail lists that focus on children’s issues.

### In about an hour a month

- Cultivate long-term relationships with a public official or other decision-maker in your community.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper.
- Talk to other pediatricians, health care clinicians, and parents that you come into contact with about the advocacy issues you care about.
- Meet with a decision-maker at your place of work or in the community.
- Attend community forums and events sponsored by decision-makers or children’s health and safety groups in your area.

### In more than an hour a month

- Testify before the state legislature or participate in community forums.
- Set up an advocacy booth or display in your professional setting that explains the issue you care about and gives people information and resources for getting involved.
- Serve as a spokesperson for a local issue or community-based organization.
- Volunteer as a board member of a children’s health organization working on advocacy in your community.
- Apply for community advocacy grants.
- Become a member or chairperson of your chapter’s government affairs committee.

12

## When Calling Decision-Makers

- **Plan:** Before you make the call, plan what you are going to say. Your phone call will be very brief, so keep your message simple and to the point.
- **Message:** Be sure to tell your story succinctly, why you care about children's health, and why you need their support. Think about the key point and how your story underscores your point of view.
- **Call:** Make the call! Tell the decision-maker that you are a pediatrician and a constituent of their legislative district and/or community.
- **Staff or Message:** If you are calling a decision-maker, you may not be able to reach them directly. Be prepared to talk to staff or to leave a succinct message instead.

13

## When Writing to Decision-Makers

- **State that you are a pediatrician and a constituent:** This matters because leaders are most interested in the opinions of people who live in their area.
- **Personalize your letter:** Research shows that personal letters have the most impact on decision-makers. If you are basing your letter on a form letter, rewrite it and consider using your personal stationery. This also gives you the chance to include your story, which is what will have the most impact.
- **Local, local, local:** Make a strong connection between children's health and what you and the decision-maker see in your home community.
- **Show restraint:** Keep your letter brief—1 to 1 ½ pages at most.

14

## When E-mailing Decision-Makers

- **In the subject line of the message, state that you are a pediatric resident and member of their community:** This strategy will increase the likelihood that your message is read. (eg, Subject: Message from a constituent and pediatric resident.)
- **If the e-mail is mass-produced, modify it:** It doesn't take much time to insert your personal story and perspective, and it makes a big difference in making your e-mail credible rather than "canned."
- **Follow up:** Because e-mail is a more casual and often a mass-produced mode of communication, be sure that you are using other methods to persuade decision-makers. Follow your e-mail with a phone call, personal letter or visit.

15

## When Meeting with Decision-Makers

- Meeting with your elected official gives you the chance to interact with him or her in a way that is not possible through a letter or e-mail.
- **Before the meeting:** Plan out what you are going to share, including why you care about the issue and how it affects other people they represent. Be sure to include a direct "ask".
- **During the meeting:** Allow time for dialogue and invite questions.
- **After the meeting:** Thank the decision-makers for their time and let them know how they can reach you should they have questions. Send a thank you note, e-mail, or fax.

16



## Additional Tips to Keep in Mind

- You don't need to be an expert in all of the technicalities of your advocacy issue.
- You only need to be an expert in your story—how the problem affects your patients and/or your profession and how the solution can bring about meaningful and direct change.
- Communicating with a decision-maker is not much different from the communication you use every day.
- Follow-up and repeated contact makes a difference. Send your decision-maker supporting information or work with your chapter to get them what they need.

17

## SUMMARY

- Effective advocacy—or getting decision-makers to support your issue—is about letting decision-makers know what you think about the issues you care about.
- Through personal and ongoing contact, not only can you gain their attention, but you can build a relationship with decision-makers that will make them more likely to support children's health and well-being in the future.

18