

Lobby During the Legislative Process

Thousands of bills are introduced at the state and federal levels each year; most never become law. In many instances, a bill's fate hinges upon a critical mass of support or opposition from unions, chambers of commerce, nonprofit advocacy organizations, and grassroots organizations. By voicing support to policymakers for bills related to early childhood issues, you can play a major role in the policy-making process by helping to move bills forward and expand awareness of the issues.

At the state level, you may have the opportunity to **testify before the committee** that is responsible for the bill in a committee hearing. You can also submit written testimony. At the federal level, testifying is generally not open to the public. However, it is effective to contact the committee members regarding a bill. If your legislator is on the relevant committee, contact him or her prior to a committee vote. If your legislator is not on the committee, ask him or her to speak to the committee chair.

Even if there is not a specific bill to discuss, you should talk to legislators about the importance of early childhood investments in your community, offer to be a source of information on early childhood issues, and ask your legislator to support the funding and policies needed for high-quality programs.

If a bill is passed out of committee and is read, discussed, and amended on the floor of the initiating chamber, you have the opportunity to expand your outreach to your legislator via telephone, letter, or e-mail. Should the bill pass through the chamber, you will have an opportunity to replicate these processes as the bill moves through the second chamber.

There are numerous opportunities to influence decision-makers during the legislative process.

When a bill is introduced, write and call your representatives. This lets them know the issue is important to their constituents. Ask your representatives to speak with members of the relevant committees working on the bill.

As the bill moves forward in the second chamber, begin to extend your lobbying activities to include the governor's or president's office. Executive support can make or break a bill and overriding a veto is not easy at the state or the federal level.

Maximize your impact. At each step in the process, ask your colleagues and friends to participate as well. Give them basic information about the bill and contact information for their legislators. The impact supporters or opponents make depends, in part, on the number of people who participate.