



CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION FOR THE RETARDED

1220 - 'S' Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, CA 95811

Phone (916) 498-1635 - Fax (916) 498-1385

www.carforchoice.org

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HOW TO GET YOUR LEGISLATOR ON *YOUR* SIDE

Because it is important to be able to influence individual legislators on key votes, CAR has compiled some ideas for you to use as you approach your individual legislators at the local level. Here are some of the things you need to do or find out:

1. **Who are my legislators?** Make sure you know who your state and congressional representatives are for both the area in which you live as well as the area in which your local community program or developmental center is located.

State: contact www.leginfo.ca.gov to look up state legislators by zip code

Congressional: contact www.house.gov or www.senate.gov

2. **What committees are they on?** Find out if your legislators are on any of the key committees that review developmental services issues, for example, Health, Human Services, Appropriations, Budget and Fiscal Review (and their subcommittees). (To identify committee members, see *California Legislative Phone and Fax Numbers by Capitol and District Offices*, prepared by CAR. An updated version is posted on our website at www.carforchoice.org.)
3. **What does their web site offer?** Spend a few minutes visiting their web site. See if they have a schedule of local activities such as town hall meetings.
4. **How do I contact them?** In addition to phone and mail and/or fax, find out if their web site offers a direct way to e-mail your comments.
5. **What about new law makers?** Because new law makers may still be settling in, check back at their web site in a month or so to see if they have posted any additional information.

6. **What services can their staff offer?** Ask if the legislator has a newsletter. If so, have your name added to their mailing list. Find out the name of the office staff person who handles developmental services issues.
7. **What information can I offer?** If your organization has a newsletter, make sure you add your legislators to the mailing list.
8. **What can I do to get acquainted?** Schedule a visit to your legislator's local office to discuss your concerns about issues affecting the developmental disabilities system. Invite legislators to attend your local unit events like annual dinners, picnics, etc. Acknowledge that they have many other commitments, but emphasize you would be glad if they could drop by or send a staff representative in their place.
9. **How can I give them a better understanding of my local program?** Invite them to tour your facility or center and meet the clients and staff. Use the time to talk with them about problems or concerns. Fridays often are best because members usually are in their districts.
10. **How can I inform and influence legislators on critical budget and legislative issues?** During the legislative/budget season, CAR will e-mail, fax, or mail Action Alerts to its board members and representatives as well as others on its mailing list. It is important that local units have a system to pass these along to members within their organizations. These Action Alerts identify a particular issue and provide a sample letter that can be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to the Governor and/or legislators.
11. **How can I get my legislators interested in issues of importance to me?** When you write, call or meet with your legislators or their staff, try to get them involved in the issue by asking them how a particular action (budget proposal or legislative bill) will affect people and programs in their district. Stress to your legislators that it is important for them to know how their district voters will be affected before they themselves take action. Ask them to follow-up with a response or to keep you informed of any actions they may take.
12. **How can I use my local newspapers to my organization's advantage?** Most newspapers give readers an opportunity to express their concerns on local issues through letters to the editor or opinion pieces. You can call or e-mail the newspaper to find out if they have any restrictions or guidelines for submission of such pieces. If one of your submissions is printed, be sure to send a copy to your local legislators.
13. **How can I get more information on legislative issues?** The CAR

website provides the following (www.carforchoice.org):

- A legislative report that identifies the contents and status of legislative bills that affect the developmental disabilities service system
- Information on how to contact elected officials
- Action Alerts if the Legislature or Governor are proposing or considering budget or legislative proposals affecting our system
- Documents including position statements as well as letters that CAR has written to the Governor, the Legislature, state departments and others, on critical legislative and budget issues.

If you have questions or problems, you may contact the CAR office in Sacramento at (916) 498-1635 or carforchoice@aol.com. We will be happy to provide assistance.