



Legislative Leadership Resource Packet

KACTE

(Kentucky Association for Career and Technical Education)

January 2000

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Everyone Has a Role in Legislative Advocacy

The American political process not only provides the opportunity for citizen involvement, good government demands it. Perhaps Plato said it best: *“The punishment of wise men who refuse to take part in the affairs of government is to live under the government of unwise men.”*

Many times, professionals — like teachers and administrators — feel that they should not be involved in legislative advocacy. They may view the political process in a bad light. They may think their careers are above the fray. They may think that their employment contracts prohibit involvement.

While employment contracts may prohibit involvement in partisan political action (such as working directly on a campaign), every citizen retains the right to communicate with legislators on matters of concern. As long as that communication is done professionally and without partisan bias — in other words, information and education about ideas and ideals — professionals are within the bounds of their citizenship.

Other times, individuals may think that their voice is not strong enough to be heard. That no one cares. That legislative advocacy is just a waste of time. If you think that, consider that a U.S. Senate staff member advises senators on how to vote based on the height of the piles of constituent letters received on the issues before the committee. The highest pile gets the recommendation.

Consider, too, the 1998 efforts of the Alabama Vocational Association. It was asked to help secure \$5 million additional for vocational education from the Alabama legislature. The association decided to ask for \$20 million. The legislature appropriated \$15 million — three times what originally was considered. It

was achieved through grassroots legislative advocacy that emphasizes the success of career and technical education programs and how those programs were absolutely critical for Alabama’s youth and re-skilling adults to obtain the jobs of the future.

Kentucky is facing the same challenges. Studies, reports and analyses from government and private-sector research indicate that every job in the emerging global, information society will require some degree of technical and career proficiency. Those life skills are taught in career and technical education programs blended with rigorous academic study.

Kentucky’s economic and workforce success is directly dependent on a career and technical education system — from middle school to college, and beyond — that provides skill training for the jobs in Kentucky’s private sector. As Toyota Motor Company’s Dennis Parker said:

“High-quality graduates from Kentucky’s technical education system are as important to Toyota’s success as are high-quality products from our business partners. Improvements in Kentucky’s technical education programs are observable in improvements in Toyota’s world-class workforce.”

As the individuals at the forefront of this effort, Kentucky’s career and technical education professionals — teachers and administrators — understand this truth for Kentucky’s future better than anyone else. That makes them the best people to convey the message that career and technical education in the Commonwealth is successful and is striving to improve. That effort requires continued investment to maintain teacher skills and provide modern equipment for instruction. If you don’t speak for yourself, who will?

Communication Is Essential in Effective Advocacy

Personal contact using a one-on-one relationship is the most effective means of communicating with legislators. A face-to-face meeting is the best way to show your sincere interest in good government and reinforce your position. Supporting those meetings with on-going telephone, letter writing, fax and e-mail communications keeps the issues fresh in the legislator's mind.

REMEMBER to say and express thanks whenever you communicate with elected officials. They support your positions because they believe they are good public policy, but they are under no obligation. Giving thanks not only is courteous, but also reminds them that you're following what they are doing.

There are three forms of communication: *Personal Visits*, *Telephone Calls*, and *Letters*, which include fax and e-mail

In making personal visits, try to schedule early, have a specific topic to cover and keep the meeting as brief as possible. Elected officials typically are very busy balancing their schedule. They want and appreciate constituent contact, but they also want and appreciate concise information.

Follow the same brevity and pointedness if a telephone call is necessary because of timeliness. Make sure, before the call, that you have a script of at least notes covering the essential points you want to make.

Letter writing is the most practical method of communicating for most people. Again, the same rules apply. Get to the point.

Tips

The following are some tips that apply generally to any type of legislative communication.

- Seek action at the earliest stage possible.
- Don't assume legislative support; restate your position on every issue.
- Ask legislators to work on behalf of your position.
- Present accurate facts and good arguments.
- Communicate your viewpoint concisely and intelligently.
- Show how you, your family and your community will be affected.
- Request specific, direct action.
- Be friendly; and don't just contact legislators when you want their vote.
- Make appointments to see the legislator and staff when they are in your area of the state.
- Don't promise more than you can deliver.
- Be positive; don't use threats; suggest rather than demand; be constructive.
- Offer to provide follow-up information or assist in helping the legislator gain more knowledge on the issue(s).
- Don't pester; don't become a constant pen pal; don't become a nuisance.
- Don't surprise the lawmaker.
- Give credit when it's due.
- Write a thank-you letter — no matter what action the elected official took. The fact that you were heard is an important accomplishment.

The following page was taken from a previous Kentucky Vocational Association legislative package. Legislative advocacy is a proven process that works — if you follow the rules. Former Kentucky State Senator Georgia Powers' *Ten Commandments for Successful Living with your Legislator* are worth noting.

A Legislative Advocacy Letter Model

Below is a legislative advocacy letter model. A few tips for professional communication include:

- Use personal or business stationery with a correct return address. Envelopes are discarded.
- Keep your letter brief with one issue; one page, if possible.
- State your purpose clearly in the **FIRST** paragraph.
- Identify the subject by bill number or state a specific issue.
- Use your own words. **DO NOT** send copied letters with fill-in-the-blank name lines.
- Letters do not have to be literary gems or polished masterpieces. Sincerity counts.

Always include your address, phone, fax, e-mail.

Your Address

Date

Address the letter properly.

The Honorable (Name)
The Capitol Annex
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Senator or Representative (Name):

Express thanks; remind of past support.

I thank you for your past support of career and technical education, and because of that past support I am writing about (bill number, description of specific issue, etc.). I believe action on this matter will be important to Kentucky's future. (If the matter can be localized to the constituent area, that should be included.)

Explain concern, issue.

Identify yourself; mention your district, residence, employment; establish expertise.

This is a paragraph to identify yourself, where you are employed or why this issue is of particular interest to you. This paragraph also should note your membership in a larger group, if applicable, since the weight of additional voters concerned with the matter will give credence to the letter.

Explain association connection, position.

Be timely.

When (the bill, specific issue) comes before the (House/Senate) on (date), I urge you to (support, oppose) the (item). I believe the measure will (give your reasons clearly and briefly; provide appropriate facts, figures and anecdotes).

State the reasons for your request.

Again, express thanks; ask for a response; offer to assist.

Thank you for your consideration. Please let me know what your position on (item) will be. Please let me know whether I can provide additional information on this subject.

Make your name legible

Sincerely,
Name