



ADVOCACY MATTERS

How do we change the world for our children in a positive and sustained way? The answer is simple. If we want to change the world, we have to change policy. Children are powerless because they have no voice and they have no vote. They are virtual afterthoughts at best in the political process. That is where we come in. Through advocacy, each of us can help level the playing field for our children.

Melanie R. Bridgeforth, Executive Director
VOICES for Alabama's Children

WHY? Policymakers want and need to hear from you about issues you consider important. They also know their political future lies in your hands!

HOW? Find your legislative representatives' contact information by visiting <http://www.legislature.state.al.us> and entering your ZIP Code in the lower left hand corner.

Send a letter or email to your Legislaor...

A well-written letter or email is one of the best ways to let your legislator know your thoughts and opinions about a particular issue. Here are some tips for getting your message across effectively:

A well-written letter or email is one of the best ways to let your legislator know your thoughts and opinions about a particular issue. Here are some tips for getting your message across effectively:

- **Be specific, brief and courteous** even if you don't agree with the policymaker's position on the issue. Legislators have many demands on their time. They appreciate letters that are short and to the point.
- **Identify that you are advocating** for VOICES and the Children of Alabama.
- **Put the message in your own words.** Form letters and petitions don't have the same impact as personal, informed opinions.
- **Address your letter to a specific legislator or legislators.** Depending on your message, you may want to write to the sponsor of a bill, certain members of a committee, or your own legislators. Don't address your letter to the entire Legislature.
- **Identify bills** by their number, sponsor and title (if appropriate).
- **Explain your position** on the bill and the importance of the legislation to you, your community and our state and ask for the legislator's support or opposition.
- **Give any sources of information** that you use to make your point. When possible, incorporate data from the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book* to strengthen your message.
- **Include your name, address and a little about you** — for example, where you work or what school you attend and remind them that you are a registered voter in their district.
- **Request a reply.** Always close by asking for a response in writing from the policymaker. You are taking time to contact them concerning this issue and since they are representing you, they should take time to write you back.

You may also consider sending a letter via fax when a decision on a vote is forthcoming. Faxing has become a popular method of communication. It is a quick and easy way to get a letter to them.

Addressing a letter to a Senator:

Honorable (full name)
(room #) Alabama Statehouse
11 South Union Street
Montgomery, AL 36130

Addressing a letter to a Representative:

Honorable (full name)
(room#) Alabama Statehouse
11 South Union Street
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Senator (full name),

Dear Representative (full name),

Make a phone call to your Legislator...

This is quick, easy and can be done at a moment's notice, making it an attractive method for legislative contact. Telephone contact is best utilized if one is asking a legislator to support or oppose a particular bill before a public hearing, a committee vote or a floor vote. Follow these steps for an effective call to your legislator:

- **Plan** your call carefully. Keep to the point and discuss only one issue. Organize your thoughts ahead of time and make notes to help you stay on track.
- **Begin** by introducing yourself and identify yourself as a constituent. Legislators are most responsive to the people who can keep them in office. If you voted for the legislator, mention that as well. State your topic and say **WHAT** you care about, **SUPPORT** or **OPPOSE**, and **WHY**. Use data from the *Alabama Kids Count Data Book* when possible.
- **Request** a response. Regardless of your Legislator's stand on an issue, never use abusive language or threaten them in any way. If the policymaker does not support the bill you are calling about, kindly let them know that you are disappointed in their position and hope that he will he will reconsider his position on the bill.
- **Thank** the legislator for their time and let them know that you will track the issue.
- **Recruit** and persuade other like-minded individuals to make a call as well. Particularly with phone calls, quantity is critical.
- **PLAN to call from time to time** as you are following the issue. Let them know you are talking to people in your community and will circle back from them as events develop.
- **Remember** you may not be able to reach your legislator if you are calling his office during the legislative session. Be prepared to leave a message instead.

During the session, Representatives may be contacted by calling (334) 242-7600;

Senators may be contacted by calling (334) 242-7800.

You may also find a direct number using ALISON: <http://www.legislature.state.al.us>

Meet face-to-face...

The most effective means, by far, to express your view on an issue to your Legislator, and to positively affect outcome of policy debates and of legislation, is to speak with Legislators face-to-face. Follow these steps for a productive meeting:

- **Plan** your call or visit carefully. Keep to the point and discuss only one issue. Organize your thoughts ahead of time and make notes to help you stay on track.
- **Make an appointment.** Don't just drop by your legislator's office and expect him or her to drop everything to see you. Call or write for an appointment as soon as you know when you are going to be at the Capitol.
- **Discuss how the legislation you are concerned about will affect you**, your family, your friends, and your community. Personal stories make a powerful impact and are proven to achieve results.
- **Prepare a one-page fact sheet** concerning your issue to give to your legislator. This will help him or her better retain what you present.
- **Follow-up after the visit** with a personal thank you letter to the Legislator or staff member for their time. Also, offer your assistance or expertise on this matter in the future.

Note:

- ◆ *If the Legislature is in session and your Senator/Representatives are in the Chamber, you may request that a message be sent to him/her through the receptionist.*
- ◆ *The House Chamber is on the 5th floor; the Senate Chamber is on the 7th floor.*
- ◆ *One of the best and most convenient ways of visiting with Legislators is in their hometown offices, when schedules and timing may not be quite as hectic as during the Legislative session in Montgomery.*

VISITING THE ALABAMA STATE HOUSE

Legislative Schedule:

The Alabama Legislature meets in annual Regular Sessions, each of which can consist of no more than 30 Legislative (meeting) days, within a 105 calendar day period. By statute, the dates for convening of annual sessions, for each year of a quadrennium (4-year period), are as follows (all times, Noon):

- 1st Year: 1st Tuesday in March
- 2nd Year: First Tuesday in February
- 3rd Year: First Tuesday in February
- 4th Year: 2nd Tuesday in January

Special Sessions may be called at any time, by the Governor, for emergency or extraordinary reasons. Special Sessions can consist of no more than 12 Legislative (meeting) days, within a 30 calendar day period. In his/her Proclamation, calling the Legislature into such session, the Governor will state the date and time for convening of such session.

Meeting Days:

Once in session, whether Regular or Special, the Legislature regulates its own schedule of meeting days and times for convening. Normally, the schedule of a Regular Session consists of Legislative (meeting) days on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with Committee meetings held on Wednesdays. However, please note, that this schedule can change from week to week, and that Committees may meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays, while their respective body is not in actual session.

Therefore, before planning a trip to see the Legislature in session please be sure of its planned meeting days and times of convening. You may do this by calling the Senate, at (334) 242-7800, and the House of Representatives, at (334) 242-7600. After hours, you may call these numbers to receive a recorded message, stating the day and time each body will next meet.

VOICES for Alabama's Children's offers a full version of the Advocacy Toolkit online at www.alavoices.org under Legislative Advocacy

State House Hours & Access:

Legislative office hours are 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. During Legislative sessions, evening hours are extended if either of the two houses of the Legislature is still in session. Access to the State House is provided during any hour that the Legislature is in session.

Meeting With Your Legislator:

If you wish to meet with your Representative or Senator, on a Legislative Day, it is best to call ahead to make an appointment.

Legislative Information

To find information on your legislator, visit www.legislature.state.al.us or call Senate information at (334) 242-7800 or House of Representatives information at (334) 242-7600.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS (Area Code 334)

Senate Office	242-7800
House Office	242-7600
Secretary of the Senate	242-7806
Clerk of the House	242-7609
Lt. Governor	242-7900
Speaker of the House	242-7668
Senate Bill Status	242-7826
House Bill Status	242-7730
Senate Public Information	242-7836
House Public Information	242-7730
State House Tours	242-7096

ELECTION INFORMATION

For information regarding elections and registering to vote, please visit the Alabama Secretary of State's website at: <http://www.sos.state.al.us/Elections/Default.aspx> or call the Secretary of State's Election Division at 1-800-274-8683 or 334-242-7210.

VOICES for Alabama's Children—Established in 1992 through the vision of leading child advocates, VOICES for Alabama's Children was the first, and remains the only, organization to document the health, safety, education, and economic conditions of children in each of our state's 67 counties. From building public awareness to leading legislative advocacy efforts, all of VOICES' activities are based on a solid foundation of research. The organization's goal is to ensure that all Alabama children have the best chance to succeed in life.