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# YOUNG ADVOCATES TOOLKIT

A Guide To Being A champion for children

with project support from



North Carolina  
CIVIC EDUCATION  
CONSORTIUM



AMERICAN  
ASSOCIATION OF  
UNIVERSITY  
WOMEN  
North Carolina

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July 2007

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# **“Knowledge is POWER.” —Sir Francis Bacon**

Dear Champion for Children,

Action for Children North Carolina thanks you for your commitment to the children, youth and families of North Carolina and wants to be your partner. Together, let's shape the future of our state!

People under age 25 are the ideal spokespeople to raise concerns about the well-being of children and youth in North Carolina. You know what works in your community and what doesn't. You know how children and youth feel. You know what children and youth are worried about. The best way to start being a champion for children and youth is to learn by doing.

A leader is able to motivate and inspire others to act. A leader can tell others what needs to happen to help people who cannot speak for themselves. You are a leader! You can influence others to work together to improve the future for all children and youth in North Carolina. Now is your chance to speak up and speak out!

Voting is not the only opportunity you have to get involved. You can also contact your local, state and federal leaders about issues that matter to you. You can participate in (or even host) community forums, testify in front of the county commission or state legislature and talk to newspaper and broadcast reporters. Action for Children needs your help locally to bring issues affecting children and youth to the forefront.

The goal of this Young Advocates Toolkit is to provide you with the tools, skills and experiences necessary to affect change in your school, community, state and nation.

Tab 1 introduces the toolkit with a brief description of Action for Children—our vision, mission and policy successes that have resulted from many collaborative efforts with fellow child and youth advocates. Also included is a Glossary of Frequently Used Terms that we hope will help you better understand terms used throughout the toolkit. Lastly, read about successes young people like you have enjoyed when they have realized a need, developed a strategy and taken action. The sky is the limit in terms of creativity!

But first, in order to take action on behalf of children and youth, you must get a sense of the issues affecting young people in your community. Tab 2 offers background information on the issues affecting children, youth and families in North Carolina, specifically within the realms of family economic security, health, safety, early care, education, child maltreatment and juvenile justice. It's important that you study up on these issues. We know, studying isn't everyone's idea of a fun time, but putting in a little time will pay off. You'll be surprised how the more facts you know, the more credible you will be. Given that, we've included a data snapshot of these issue areas so you can get a real sense of how children and youth are faring in our state over time. Also, county- and community-level data are available on our website, [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org), through our CLIKS portal, and we've provided you instructions for how to access it. If you ever need data to support your work or have any questions about data you've come across, give us a call or e-mail us anytime.

## **What Does Being a Champion for Children Mean?**

It means identifying the issues of most importance to the children in your community and in our state. It means developing a plan for addressing those issues locally and/or at the state level. It takes building relationships and community allies who agree with you. It means speaking up and/or taking action to solve a problem or issue you want addressed. It also means monitoring and assessing what you have done to see how effective your actions were.

Once you've picked an issue you feel passionate about, have done the research and are knowledgeable and confident about a solution you could offer, the fun begins. Time to speak up! Tab 3 offers you a range of ways to make a difference, from presenting to local officials at public hearings and school board meetings, to writing letters to your legislators, to circulating a petition, to voting. The possibilities for getting involved and speaking up for children and youth are endless. The first step to success is just giving it a shot! We've provided you with templates for how to craft a strong letter to your newspaper's editor or to your legislator directly, as well as instructions for how to phone your elected officials and participate in meetings at which they may be present. As a further guide to help you get started, we've provided you with some sample questions to ask people running for public office, to ensure that children and youth are a top-of-mind priority in their legislative agenda.

Tab 4 offers further information about how you can speak out and take action legislatively. The legislative process can be tricky, but don't let that intimidate you. It helps to familiarize yourself with the workings of the N.C. General Assembly and what to expect. We've also included a basic introduction to federal, or national-level, advocacy. Again, simply focus on an issue or, better yet, a particular piece of legislation; get to know your lawmaker and his or her values; keep your pulse to the timing of when decisions will be made; and then speak out! We hope this toolkit will relieve any fears of what it takes to testify at a legislative hearing or calling or meeting your U.S. Congressman. If you have any questions or concerns, again, don't hesitate to contact us.

Finally, we are pleased to provide you with a resource guide to help you on your way to becoming involved in civic work and being an advocate on behalf of children and youth in our state. Tab 5 offers a listing of national and state resources and their contact information.

We hope that you will use this toolkit to the advantage of our children and youth and their well-being! An online version of this toolkit is also available at [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org). Feel free to download and copy the materials provided. Share copies with your friends!

As always, let us know what we can do to support your efforts to improve conditions for children in your community. Check out the **Youth Involvement** section of our website at [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org) for more information on how you can get involved!

In partnership for all children,  
Action for Children North Carolina

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***Join Action for Children as we work to make North Carolina  
the best place to be and raise a child!***

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# Introduction



# About Us: Action for Children North Carolina

## VISION

The **vision** of Action for Children North Carolina is that our state will be the best place to be a child and raise a child.

## MISSION

The **mission** of Action for Children North Carolina is to advocate for child well-being by educating and engaging all people across the state to ensure that our children are healthy, safe, well-educated and have every opportunity for success.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Action for Children North Carolina is proud of its history of initiating positive changes for all children. From affecting government decisions and serving as the convener of local advocacy groups across the state, to creating partnerships with business, media, faith and civic communities, Action for Children works tirelessly in fulfilling its mission.

Examples of public policy successes include:


- ★ Guaranteeing tens of thousands more children access to preventive health care, eyeglasses and dental care with the continued expansion of health insurance;
- ★ Ensuring more than half-a-million children across North Carolina receive quality early care and education with the creation of Smart Start and More at Four;
- ★ Saving the lives of hundreds of children with the founding of the N.C. Child Fatality Task Force. Since the founding of the Task Force, the child death rate has dropped more than 20%;
- ★ Reducing motor vehicle deaths of young children (ages 5 to 7) by an expected 60% with the passage of the booster seat law;
- ★ Keeping children safe and less likely to suffer head injuries by promoting the requirement for helmets on bike riders under age 16;
- ★ Decreasing the number of new drivers killed by more than 20% since passage of the graduated drivers' license law;
- ★ Reducing All Terrain Vehicle (ATV)-related deaths and serious injuries of children by an expected 50%;
- ★ Improving healthy food selections available to children in vending machines and school lunchrooms; and
- ★ Reducing the risk of motor vehicle accidents by banning cell phone use among teenagers currently under the graduated drivers' license provision.

Action for Children improves the well-being of children and young people everyday. Join Action for Children as we build on past successes, pioneer new approaches and create opportunities for **all** of North Carolina's children.



### ***Contribute to organizations that promote the welfare of children and youth***

Create and hold fundraising events for your favorite organizations.  
Lend them your talent and time. Do they need bookkeeping?  
Database entry? Website design? Do you have an extra chair you can donate or a ream of paper? It all helps.





# Glossary of Frequently Used Terms

**Advocacy** is speaking up and speaking out to bring about necessary change.

A **bill amendment** is a proposal by a legislator (in committee or floor session of the respective chamber) to alter the language or provision of a bill or act.

A **champion** is defined as someone who works on behalf of a cause.

A **Children's Rights Group** is an organization and/or group that works to ensure that the rights of our most vulnerable members of society—children—are not forsaken. Children's rights groups work on multiple issues to improve child well-being, including child health and safety, early care and education, family economic security, child maltreatment and juvenile justice and delinquency prevention.

A **coalition** is a group of people focused on advancing or opposing a particular issue.

A **constituent** is a citizen residing within the district of a legislator.

**Direct lobbying** is contacting government officials or employees directly to influence legislation.

**Grassroots** work is focused on activating people at the local level to engage in policy debate.

A **grassroots coalition** mobilizes allies through efforts to increase community understanding and support.

**Grassroots lobbying** is appealing to the general public to contact the legislature about an issue.

A **leader** is a person who guides or inspires others.

A **legislative agenda** is a summary of issues concerning a particular group/organization that will be promoted during a legislative session.

The **Legislature** is the lawmaking body of the State of North Carolina. It consists of two chambers, the House of Representatives and the Senate, as was formed by the N.C. Constitution to make and revise laws, approve certain executive nominations and propose constitutional changes.

## **Levels of Government:**

**Federal government** consists of elected Representatives and Senators from all 50 states, a President and a Supreme Court. The three branches of federal government are legislative, executive and judicial.

**State government** consists of elected state Representatives and Senators, a Governor and a State Supreme Court. The three branches of state government are legislative, executive and judicial.

**Local government** consists of a city council, mayor, county commissioners and local board of education.


**Lobbying** is the process of trying to influence policymakers in favor of a specific cause.

**Nonpartisan** is not formally declaring or having a political party affiliation.


**Nonpartisan organizations** are those that work across political parties.

**Public policy** is the set of rules and laws that guide our daily lives. Public policies are created by local, state and federal governments through laws, regulations and budgets.


# Success Stories: Youth-Led Advocacy Initiatives




Students at West Branch Middle School in Iowa saved the school nearly \$250 a month on electricity by using energy-saving T8 light bulbs. Their effort to cut electrical usage in all schools was initially met with resistance by the local school board. The student proposal called for a low-interest loan to pay for more efficient bulbs and changing the light sockets. After four months of persistent lobbying by students, the cautious school board members approved the plan.



A high school junior in Olympia, Washington, was on a car trip with her sister and thought: "If you're 16 and you're driving, you are taking on the risk of a car crash. So why can't you be an organ donor?" She found out that organ donors must be at least 18 years old and proposed amending the law to allow anyone over 15 to have an organ donor designation on their driver's license, provided they have the consent of a parent or guardian. The Governor heard about her idea, held a press conference with this young activist, and as a result, the law was amended to increase the number of people who can be potential organ donors.





Elementary school students in Colorado launched a campaign for new sidewalks. First, they met with the city planner, surveyed business and property owners, recorded traffic patterns and researched the cost of sidewalk construction. They presented their photos, statistics, surveys and petitions to the City Council. Their demands were heeded.



Chronic lack of funding for urban schools is another fact of life, yet speeches and statistics typically fail to get the attention of the powers-that-be. Students attending different Baltimore public schools took more than 1,000 photographs documenting the conditions in the schools. Fifty of the pictures were selected for exhibits held in the city and at the Maryland General Assembly. Legislators decided on a \$100 million increase for school facilities due, in part, to this very visual advocacy campaign coordinated by Critical Exposure. Check out [www.criticalexposure.org](http://www.criticalexposure.org).

A group of students at King City High School in California wanted the vending machines to offer other snacks besides chips and candy bars. The group collaborated with the Vice Principal and the snack company to find low-fat foods that could be sold in the machines. The group did a taste-test on campus so the entire student body could vote on which snacks they preferred. As a result, vending machines at this school now are filled with pretzels, low-fat cereal bars and other healthier snacks.



In Hopkins, Missouri (population 600), a high school sophomore wanted to turn an abandoned theater into a teen center. After recruiting some friends, they made a presentation to Community 2000 and wrote a short article in their weekly newspaper. Bingo! As a result of this publicity, the students received an anonymous donation of \$40,000. Take a look at The Roxy, visit [www.msc.net/cory.stahl/Roxy](http://www.msc.net/cory.stahl/Roxy).

Source: Youth Activism. Available at: [www.youthactivism.com](http://www.youthactivism.com)



# Learn About The Issues Affecting Your Community



# Child Well-Being Data and Research

As a statewide nonprofit organization devoted to improving the well-being of North Carolina's children and youth, Action for Children North Carolina uses research, data collection, advocacy and education to initiate change on behalf of children. Our work positively influences the knowledge, attitudes and ultimately the actions of a broad cross-section of people across the state to address issues that affect our children.

We do this by compiling, analyzing and sharing accurate, up-to-date statistics and research on child well-being indicators with people and policymakers statewide. Action for Children also partners with community leaders to directly influence—in an independent, nonpartisan manner—the attitudes and actions of all people across the state. Our work to educate, engage and influence people has the ultimate goal of ensuring data-driven, cost-effective public policy to benefit and protect our state's children and youth. If you need data to support your work, give us a call or e-mail us anytime.

## Issue Areas<sup>1</sup>

Children and youth in our state are worse off than children in 39 other states. Let's look at why this is the case. Issue-specific fact sheets as well as full copies of reports are available free-of-charge online at [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org).

### Family Economic Security

Children who grow up poor are more likely to experience negative outcomes. When families are economically stable and secure, children are more likely to succeed. Action for Children works to support children and families by promoting policies that increase access to family support resources.

★ **Did you know?** 60% of all low-income families have at least one parent who is working full-time.

### Health

Children cannot learn or succeed if they are not healthy. Action for Children works to ensure that all children have access to high quality, affordable health care.

★ **Did you know?** In North Carolina, 264,000 children lack health care coverage—that's enough children to stretch from Greensboro to Wilmington holding hands.

### Safety

Injury is the leading cause of death in children over the age of 1. Action for Children seeks to reduce both intentional and unintentional childhood injuries.

★ **Did you know?** Since passage of the booster seat law in 2004, motor vehicle deaths of young children (ages 5-7) have declined 60%.

### Early Care

Children need high quality early care and education because research shows that the early years of life set the stage for future development; families and parents rely on child care so that they can work. Action for Children works to ensure that all children have access to high quality early care and education, particularly our most vulnerable children.

★ **Did you know?** Every dollar invested in early care and education has a \$7 return to society.

<sup>1</sup> Action for Children's policy and research work focuses on a number of areas of importance to child and youth well-being. To view our publications in any of the issue areas please visit [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org)

## Education

The academic success of our children has significant implications for the well-being of our families and communities as well as for the growth of the local and state economies. Data show that many of North Carolina's children and youth are not receiving the kind of education needed to become successful adults. Action for Children works to address educational inadequacies and to ensure that every child has the opportunity to receive a high-quality education.

- ★ *Did you know?* One-in-three students who start high school in North Carolina does not graduate.

## Child Maltreatment

Children thrive in safe, supportive and nurturing families and communities. Far too many children in North Carolina are experiencing dangerous and damaging childhoods instead. Action for Children works to promote understanding of the scope of the problem and supports policies that will strengthen families so that all children grow up in safe, permanent families.

- ★ *Did you know?* Every year, hundreds of youth age out of foster care without anyone to help them successfully transition to adulthood.

## Juvenile Justice

Youth who enter the juvenile justice system often have encountered other difficulties in their lives. By addressing the needs of these children and youth, their lives can be turned around. Action for Children works to ensure that all children and youth in the justice system receive the services they need to become productive adults.

- ★ *Did you know?* North Carolina is one of only two states that treat youth as young as 16 as adults for *any* crime they commit.

## Examples of State Legislation

Legislation at the state level greatly affects the outcomes of children. Examples of legislative/advocacy work Action for Children has been involved in include:

- ★ Increase children's access to high-quality, affordable health insurance;
- ★ Raise the age at which young people can be charged as adults for criminal offenses; and
- ★ Implement family supports such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), paid sick days and access to child care subsidies for low-income families.

While our specific policy agenda changes each legislative session, our overall goal is always to make North Carolina the best place to be and raise a child.

## Federal Legislation

At the state and local levels, children are affected by federal issues. For more information on recent issues relating to Action for Children's work at the federal level, please visit our website at [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org).

# 2007 Data Snapshot of North Carolina's Children

For county-level data, use our online information system, CLIKS,  
found on our website, [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org).

	2000	2005
Total Population	8,078,333	8,672,544
Child Population (Under 18)	1,974,560	2,141,041
White, non-Hispanic	63.6%	61.4%
Black, non-Hispanic	27.0%	26.0%
Hispanic	6.2%	9.1%
American Indian, non-Hispanic	1.5%	1.4%
Asian, non-Hispanic	1.8%	2.1%

## Health

	2000	2005
Very Late or No Prenatal Care	3.6%	3.8%
Infant Mortality (per 1,000)	8.6	8.8
Low Birthweight Infants	8.8%	9.3%
Teen Births (per 1,000 girls ages 15-17)	44.4	35.6
Child Health Insurance		
No Insurance	10.1%	11.9%
N.C. Health Choice or Medicaid	29.4%	39.3%
Overweight Children	n/a	16.1%
Child Deaths (per 100,000 ages 0-17)	81.0	76.9

## Economic (In)Security

	2000	2005
Children in Poverty (~\$21,000 for family of 4, 2007)	19%	21%
Young Children in Poverty (ages 0-5)	19%	23%
Children in Low-Income Families (~\$42,000 for family of 4, 2007)	45%	44%
Median Family Income	\$42,400	\$46,000
Children Receiving Food Stamps	11.7%	19.5%
Children who are Work First Recipients	3.9%	2.4%

## Early Care

	2001	2006
Children in Regulated Child Care Ages 0-5		
Ages 0-5	161,103	263,907
Ages 0-12 (2005)	211,553	260,252
Children in Four and Five Star Child Care Centers	n/a	48.1%
Children in Regulated Child Care Receiving Subsidies		
Ages 0-5	62,709	62,651
Ages 0-12 (2005)	87,833	95,067
Children (0-12) Who Are Eligible and Have Applied for Subsidies, Not Receiving Them	23,212	21,725

## Child Maltreatment

	2006
Reports Investigated	118,294
Maltreatment Reports Substantiated	17,246
Families Found Services Needed	11,129
Children in Foster Care	10,013
Children with No More Than Two Different Placements in One Year	86.7%
Reunification in Less than 12 Months	57.2%

## Education

	2001	2006
Number of Students (Average Daily Membership)	1,267,070	1,369,493
Proficient or Above on End-of-Grade Testing		
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Math	73.6%	67.8%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading	76.4%	82.9%
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math	79.4%	60.7%
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading	83.3%	86.9%
Algebra 1	76.0%	82.6%
Graduation Rate	n/a	68.1%

## Juvenile Justice

	2005
Number of Complaints Against Juveniles	48,089
Number of Juveniles with Complaints	23,787
Juveniles with Complaints Approved for Court	12,402
Juveniles with Complaints Approved for Violent Crimes	666
Juveniles Sentenced	8,443
Juveniles in Youth Development Centers	486

## Young Adults

	2000	2005
Young Adults (ages 18-24) Not Attending School, Not Working, and with No Degree Beyond High School	15%	16%
Young Adults (ages 16-24) in Adult Prison	6,889	6,166
Young Adults (ages 18-24) Enrolled In or Completed College	33%	39%
High School Graduates Ages 25-29 Who Have Completed a Bachelor's Degree or Higher	28%	26%

For information about the indicators used in this report, including definitions and data sources, go to [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org), select "Data and Statistics" then "*Data Snapshot of North Carolina's Children, 2007*." County-level data for some of the indicators in this report are available through CLIKS ([www.ncchild.org/content/view/276/211/](http://www.ncchild.org/content/view/276/211/)).

# How To Obtain More Information and Facts: CLIKS (Community-Level Information on Kids)

CLIKS, an online information system that gives users access to more than 75 indicators of child and youth well-being at the county level, is available at [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org). CLIKS is the invention of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Action for Children North Carolina maintains all of the North Carolina community-level data. CLIKS puts data for all of North Carolina's 100 counties and 115 school districts at your fingertips. Data include indicators in the following areas: demographics, health, economic security, early childhood, education, child maltreatment and juvenile justice.

How to use CLIKS:

## Getting Started:

[www.kidscount.org/cliks/](http://www.kidscount.org/cliks/)

CLIKS provides 5 different ways of looking at the data. Select one of the five icons to begin.

- ★ **Profiles** gives you detailed information about a single state or region.
- ★ **Graphs** allows you to view indicators graphed over time.
- ★ **Maps** provides color-coded maps of the states based on CLIKS data.
- ★ **Rankings** allows you to view all of the regions within a state, ranked according to an indicator.
- ★ **Raw Data** gives you the opportunity to download CLIKS data.

CLIKS will ask the user to select a geographic area.

Scroll through the list of states to find North Carolina.

**Hint:** If there is a plus sign next to the state/county/school district, clicking it will expand that selection to list all geographic areas within that category.

Follow prompts as instructed to view data.

Definitions, data sources and notes are displayed at the bottom of each page.

As you finish your research on issues, consider which issue(s) makes the most sense to tackle. Which ones impact the most children? Is the solution easy or very difficult? Decide which issue(s) you think you can address most effectively. How can you make a difference?



# Speak Up: Take Action!



# 10 Simple Ways You Can Make a Difference

1. **Speak up!** Support the Legislative Agenda of Action for Children by declaring you'll take action and promote children's issues! Action for Children's website, [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org), offers specific information on how you can help. Visit our website to subscribe to InfoNet (our weekly news service), Action Alerts and Weekly Legislative Updates to get involved.
2. **Get involved with child-serving groups in your community.** Join a children's coalition. By teaming up with a group of organizations and individuals who share your concern for children and families, you strengthen your position as an advocate. Visit [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org) for a list of local and statewide advocates.
3. **Register to vote and participate in elections.** Take an active role in the process of electing policymakers. By becoming a registered voter, you are exercising your most basic right as a citizen.
4. **Encourage others to vote and to become child advocates.** Share current child well-being statistics with others, making them aware of children's needs. Work to convince them that their vote can make a difference. Visit [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org) for child well-being research and data.
5. **Write, call or visit local or state-elected officials** about a specific action you want them to take to help children.
6. **Get the message out.** Write letters to the editors of local and state newspapers.
7. **Volunteer your time and expertise.** Contact local child-serving and children's rights groups and offer to volunteer in some capacity.
8. **Contribute to organizations that promote the welfare of children.** Donate resources, knowledge, energy, time or money today to your local child-serving and children's rights groups.
9. **Encourage your workplace, neighborhood groups and faith community to improve the well-being of children.** Promote a child-friendly workplace by talking with your employer about having a "bring your child to work day." Talk with your church members about hosting a "parent's night out" to provide parents with a break from care giving.
10. **Monitor and track your actions.** Did you accomplish what you had hoped? Did anything change because of your work? What do you think you should have done differently, if anything? What is the next step?

***Encourage your workplace,  
neighborhood groups, and faith  
community to improve the well-  
being of children and youth.***

# Presenting to Local Officials at Public Hearings

## City Council

Public hearings are special meetings of City Councils to consider certain planning issues (such as school construction and redistricting, etc.). Members of the public may present their comments or concerns about proposed school location changes or other issues at public hearings. Public hearings are often publicized in community and local newspapers. Attend regular City Council meetings and talk to someone about appearing on a future agenda.

### **How do I register to speak at a public hearing?**

Call the local City Clerk's Office well in advance, and ask to have your name added to the speaker list. If the option is available, you may also sign up online.

### **What happens at a public hearing?**

At most meetings, the Chair of the public hearing will call speakers in the order in which they are registered. Speakers should have regard for other speakers by keeping their comments short and to the point. Speakers may be limited to a certain number of minutes for their presentation. You will be told how long you may speak when you register or at the meeting. The City Council may even ask you—the speaker—questions.

When the Council has heard from all registered speakers, the Council will make a decision at the same or a subsequent meeting. The Council's decision may be obtained from the City Clerk's office and if available, from the Council Meetings webpage.

## **Council Decisions**

A City Council has made a decision when members of the Council vote on a motion. A motion will be made on all issues that require a decision or direction from the City Council. If you have made a presentation to the City Council, you should receive correspondence in the mail outlining the decision that was reached. Decisions of the City Council may be available through the City Council's website. (You may also choose to share more general information with the City Council that does not require the Council to make a decision.) This is a great way to get your issue heard.

## County Board of Commissioners

The County Board of Commissioners controls the allocation of funds to the schools and to many nonprofit agencies, and reviews the annual budget submitted by the City Council.

### **How is the board structured?**

Typically, the board consists of five to seven members who are elected at-large to serve four-year terms. Terms are staggered so that, every two years, three or four Commissioners are up for election. At that time, a Chair and Vice Chair are elected for a one-year term each.

The board typically has the following responsibilities:

- ★ Structure of the county government in accordance with state statutes and adoption of administrative policy;
- ★ Adoption of the annual budget and establishment of the tax rate;
- ★ Regulation of citizen conduct through the adoption of ordinances; and
- ★ Appointment of a county manager as chief administrator.

### **Is the public allowed to speak at board meetings?**

Yes. Board meetings are open to the public and visitors are invited to attend.

## Local School Board Meetings<sup>1</sup>

Members of the community are invited and encouraged to attend public meetings of the school board to observe its deliberations. Contact your local board of education if you want to present your views to the school board. Make sure you sign up early to ensure that your voice is heard.

### **How are school boards structured?**

Local school systems in North Carolina are typically governed by a three- to seven-member board of education, though board membership varies depending on the local districts. Board members are elected from separate districts in the county and serve staggered four-year terms. The Board of Education elects a chairperson and vice-chairperson to serve one-year terms.

### **What are the responsibilities of the school board?**

The school board's primary responsibilities are to:

- ★ Set the vision and goals for the school district;
- ★ Adopt policies that give the district direction to set priorities and achieve its goals;
- ★ Hire and evaluate the superintendent;
- ★ Adopt and oversee the annual budget of the school district; and
- ★ Manage the collective bargaining process for employees of the school district.

The superintendent and administrative staff manage the system's day-to-day operations.

### **What happens during school board meetings?**

The board establishes the schedule for regular board meetings annually. A typical school board meeting will include many business items, such as approving the school calendar, adopting curriculum, overseeing construction, approving contracts with outside vendors and an opportunity for public comments.

### **When is the public allowed to speak?**

Opportunities for public comment are provided through a public hearing at some point during the meeting, typically at the beginning of each meeting for items on the agenda, and at the end of the meeting for items not on the agenda. Each participant is given a certain amount of time (i.e., three to five minutes) to address the board.

#### Typical Rules for Speakers at Public Hearings

- ★ You are typically allowed to speak for three to five minutes. At some board meetings you are warned when you have 30 seconds remaining.
- ★ At regular board meetings, speakers commenting on items on the night's agenda will be heard before speakers commenting on other topics. All speakers will be heard in the order of sign-up.
- ★ You must sign in before the meeting begins to be put on the agenda to speak. Please provide your address and topic.
- ★ Special public hearings will be called for student school assignment issues.
- ★ As a rule, the board does not hear comments on students' school assignments at regular meetings.

Due to confidentiality requirements, a public hearing is an inappropriate forum to discuss personnel issues. Citizens should instead contact the appropriate administrator *in writing*.

1. Wake County Public School System: Wake County Board of Education. Available at: [www.wcpss.net/Board/](http://www.wcpss.net/Board/)

# Tips for Writing Letters to the Editor

**Why should you write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper?** Letters to the editor are an effective way to voice your opinion to a broad audience.

**To increase the chance of having your letter published, keep the following in mind:**

- ★ **Keep it brief.** Most newspapers have word limits and all have space limits. By keeping your letter short, you improve your chances for getting published.
- ★ **Be crystal clear.** Try to make one point only. Avoid making your letter too complex or confusing.
- ★ **Include contact information.** The newspaper may want to contact you to verify information or for more details, so be sure to include your contact information.

*The N.C. Press Association website ([www.ncpress.com/members.html](http://www.ncpress.com/members.html)) has contact information for newspapers, by county.*

## Sample Letter: Writing Your Newspaper Editor

DATE

*The Hilton Record*  
312 North Main Street  
Hollywood, NC 27588

Dear Editor:

Children depend on those who care for them to provide for their health, safety and emotional well-being. When parents and other caregivers are not able to meet this responsibility, the results to children and to society are often tragic.

Abused and neglected children often carry the burden of their experiences into adulthood in the form of substance abuse, depression, physical disabilities, learning difficulties, criminal activity and the continued cycle of abuse. This cost to the lives of children also means increasing costs of care systems such as child welfare, education, health care and juvenile justice. Clearly, when a child suffers, our community suffers.

It is time to reflect on what we are doing as a community to support children and families. Children don't come with instructions and too many parents face raising their children without the support they need. We all have opportunities to reach out to parents in our families, neighborhoods or places of employment.

*[Insert information about what you want to see happen. Also include what you do specifically to help children and families, along with a phone number with area code to call for more information. Provide data! How many children, young people or families were impacted last year?]*

Let's make sure the parents in our community have the resources and support they need. Think of what it will mean for the future of children and of our community.

Sincerely,

Leslie Smith  
1831 Freedom Way  
Peace Hill, NC 27681

# Ten Tips for a Successful Letter to a Policymaker

*The General Assembly website ([www.ncga.state.nc.us](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us)) has contact information for state legislators.*

1. **Concentrate on your own elected officials.** Especially with e-mail, elected officials can be overwhelmed with communications. Elected officials care the most about their own constituents, so focus on the officials that represent you.
2. **Write original letters when possible;** they are more effective than form letters and postcards.
3. **Be clear and concise.** Name the law that is being discussed or policy that's about to be changed, and state specifically what you want the policymaker to do. For example, "I urge you to vote yes on HB1111" is much clearer than "vote to support children."
4. **Be constructive.** If you believe a proposed bill takes the wrong approach, offer an alternative. If you have expert knowledge, share it.
5. **Be polite.** Elected officials represent you and all of your neighbors. Even if you don't agree on this one issue, you never know when you may agree on the next issue and you don't want to burn any bridges. One way to show respect is to use appropriate titles when communicating (i.e., Senator, Representative...)
6. **Be creative.** Are you concerned your e-mail may get lost in a flood of others? Send a letter. Make an appointment. Send something eye-catching that reflects your concerns (an empty paper plate for a bill that affects hunger or nutrition; a picture of a clock if it is time to act; etc. Better still, get all your neighbors to send a plate or clock, too.)
7. **Provide contact information.** Let the policymaker know how you may be reached for further information, clarification or help. Remember, nobody knows how this bill will affect you and your community better than you do.
8. Respectfully **ask for a response to your request**, and indicate that you will follow up and monitor his or her action. Elected officials are busy people, but their job is to work for and report to their constituents—that's you.
9. **Follow-up.** Don't forget to say "thank you" when your elected official's vote reflects your values and priorities. As well, it's fine to express your disappointment.
10. **Remember, democracy is not a spectator sport.** Elected officials work for you. And it takes all of us to keep our representative democracy working.



# Sample Letter: Writing Your Legislator

DATE

Representative John Doe  
745 Legislative Office Building  
Raleigh, NC 27603-5925

Dear Representative Doe:

I live in your district and I vote. I appreciate your commitment to public service. I urge you to vote YES/NO on BILL NUMBER and BILL NAME.

As a STUDENT/MENTOR/VOLUNTEER, I see how this proposal affects children and families every day. TELL A SHORT STORY. The BILL would improve/worsen this situation by ...

I look forward to hearing from you regarding where you stand on this issue. Also, please let me know if you would like any additional information from me.

Thank you again for your many hours of hard work representing your constituents.

Sincerely,

Virginia Dare  
1776 Independence Way  
Lost Colony, NC 00007  
919-555-5555  
vdare@yahoo.com

## ***Always remember to be timely!***

While some officials may be happy to hear from you on any topic at any time, in reality there are narrow windows of opportunity when specific pieces of policy are being decided. Send a message to an official too early, and it gets filed and forgotten. Send it too late, and the key decision has been made without you. It's helpful to know on which committee(s) your policymaker serves. Try to target your letter or phone call when your issue is being heard in committee.

# Tips for Phoning Your Elected Officials

*Sometimes a phone call is more meaningful than an e-mail message or a letter. That's why we encourage you to call your elected officials directly. Remember, your legislators work for you! As a constituent, you have a right to be heard.*

Here are the basic steps:

1. **Decide who you are calling.** If you're not sure who your members of Congress or representatives in the state legislature are, you may go to these sites and type in your zip code to get a list of your elected officials at the national level: [www.congress.org/congressorg/home/](http://www.congress.org/congressorg/home/) and [www.ncga.state.nc.us](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us). For further state-level information on elected officials, visit the N.C. Association of County Commissioners ([www.ncacc.org](http://www.ncacc.org)), the N.C. League of Municipalities ([www.nclm.org](http://www.nclm.org)) and the N.C. School Boards' Association ([www.ncsba.org](http://www.ncsba.org)).
2. **Be prepared.** Before you call your elected official, make sure you've taken the time to prepare for the call. Have you thought through what you're going to say? Do you need more information on the issue?
3. **Place the call.** For U.S. Senators and Representatives, you can call the Congressional Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and they will patch you through to the appropriate office. For your state Senators and Representatives, you can go to the General Assembly website [www.ncga.state.nc.us](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us) for contact information.
4. **Ask for the staff person who works on the issue that concerns you.** For example, if you're concerned about health insurance for children, you should try and talk to the person in the office who works on that issue. If there are no issue-specific staffers, just leave a message with the receptionist or a voicemail. Unless you personally know your legislator, it's unlikely you'll get to talk to them directly.

## Some things you should be sure to do on the call are:

- ★ Inform the staff member that you are a constituent and provide your name and phone number;
- ★ State the bill number, name or policy issue that you're calling about;
- ★ Briefly explain why the issue matters to you;
- ★ State what you're asking the policymaker to do;
- ★ Ask for your elected official's position on the issue;
- ★ Ask him or her to send you a response in writing; and
- ★ Thank the staff person for spending the time talking to you about this important issue.

# Sample Script: Phoning Your Elected Officials

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a constituent of Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_.

I was hoping to speak with the staff person responsible for health care issues, including (expanding health insurance for children.) (Wait for the staff person or, if necessary, continue with receptionist.)

I am calling about the need to ....

## ***Give background.***

Medicaid and Health Choice have been resoundingly successful at providing health coverage to 840,000 North Carolina children. Yet, 264,000 children—enough to stretch from Greensboro to Wilmington if holding hands—lack access to the early, preventive care they need to ensure their healthy growth and development. While there is no one fix that will address all the problems in the health insurance system, what is important is that North Carolina put in place a long-term plan and begin to take the necessary steps toward improving health care.

I'd like to ask the Senator/Representative to act immediately to pass BILL NUMBER and BILL NAME to give the children of North Carolina access to the early, preventive care they need to ensure their healthy growth and development. What is the Senator's position on this issue? May I ask for a response in writing?

I live at \_\_\_\_\_, in \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. My phone number is \_\_\_\_\_.

I appreciate the time you've spent talking with me about this issue. Thank you for your time.

## ***Make a Phone Call Today!***

Make your first phone call today. Right now, your state and federal elected officials are considering whether or not to take action on hundreds of bills and thousands of issues for children and families.

If you need details for your phone call, contact Action for Children at [www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org).



# How to Start and Circulate a Petition

- ★ Show that a lot of people agree with you! Gathering signatures on a petition about your issue is a great way to educate and activate people.
  - \* The more signatures you get, the more likely it is that policymakers and the media will pay attention to you.
- ★ A petition is a form of support or opposition to an issue, a bill or a candidate. You collect signatures on that petition. By law, all people who sign the petition must be registered voters.
  - \* Anyone can circulate a petition.
- ★ Have your petitions available to sign at high-visibility locations such as grocery stores, schools and other well-traveled locations. Make certain you get permission to gather signatures at your chosen location.
  - \* Put your petition online!

## ***Get your message out & volunteer your time and expertise***

Everyone can impact your issue. Educate everyone! You can get your message out by volunteering, attending community hearings and forums, holding a meeting, joining local organizations working on child issues, starting a collaboration of other young people to take action, mentoring others who want to get involved, giving and getting feedback on your ideas and working with others to decide on a course of action that will make a difference. Be specific enough about what you want to achieve so that it is attainable, realistic and that, later, you can point to it as a measurable success.

# How to Get Involved in Your Community

- ★ Think about what you want to achieve. What groups in your community work on that issue? Join their efforts so you understand the barriers they have faced to solving the problem you have identified.
  - \* Help them understand your point of view.
- ★ Building relationships takes time, but you will have a deeper understanding of what needs to be done and what is possible.
- ★ Stay focused on your issue. Ask people if they know of others who may want to get involved and if they can introduce you to other people who feel the way you do.

# Remember to Register and to Vote

**Do I qualify to vote in North Carolina?** If you meet the following criteria you may register. Are you:

A U.S. citizen?

A resident of North Carolina and this county for 30 days before the election?

At least 18 years old by the next general election?

Not registered nor voting in any other county or state?

Not a convicted felon? If you are, have your rights of citizenship been restored?

## Where can I get a voter registration form?

Voter registration forms are available online from the State Board of Elections at [www.sboe.state.nc.us/](http://www.sboe.state.nc.us/). (Click on "Voting in North Carolina" and then "Voter Registration Forms") or call (919) 733-7173 to receive a form in the mail.

**Are there other places I can obtain a voter registration form?** You can also get a voter registration form while applying for programs and/ or benefits, including:

- ★ High Schools
- ★ Public Libraries
- ★ Department of Motor Vehicles
- ★ Department of Social Services
- ★ Social Security Administration
- ★ Services for the Blind
- ★ Work First
- ★ Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- ★ Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services
- ★ Employment Security Commission

## Where do I mail the form?

The form must be mailed to the board of elections office in your county. To find out where to mail your voter registration form, visit [www.sboe.state.nc.us/](http://www.sboe.state.nc.us/) or contact your County Board of Elections office.

## Where is my polling location?

The State Board of Election also provides information on where to vote at [www.sboe.state.nc.us/](http://www.sboe.state.nc.us/). Click on "Voting in North Carolina" and then "Find Your Polling Place."

*We have included a voter registration form for you or someone you may know.  
Additional copies can be obtained from the State Board of Elections or your County Board of Elections.*

### **Encourage others to vote and become champions for children**

Ask questions of others. How do they feel about the issue?  
Tell them what you think needs to happen to solve the problems facing children.

# Sample Questions to Ask Candidates for Public Office

## Family Economic Issues

North Carolina's economy and tax system have shown to be inadequate in meeting the needs of the state's families and children. Inflation, an inequitable tax system and inadequate wages have placed heavy burdens on North Carolina families.

**Question:** What state policies are you committed to that will make sure hardworking families have the supports they need to succeed?

**Question:** What are your plans for ensuring that low-income workers receive the living wage they deserve?

## Child Health and Safety

Research has shown that the healthier children are the more likely they are to succeed. While North Carolina has made many important gains in ensuring that our children have access to health care and are immunized, there are still many concrete steps that would improve the health and safety of our children (e.g., reducing infant mortality).

**Question:** How do you plan to improve health care coverage for North Carolina's children in working families?

**Question:** What are your goals for reducing infant mortality, especially among people of color?

**Question:** What role do you see state and local government playing in reducing childhood obesity?

## Early Care and Education

Research repeatedly demonstrates that the early years are very important. High-quality early experiences have been proven to reduce the need for special education and welfare services, reduce drop-outs and teen pregnancy and generally help launch a child toward a successful and productive adulthood.

**Question:** How do you propose North Carolina respond to help working parents obtain quality, affordable and reliable child care?

**Question:** What strategies would you use to reduce North Carolina's rates of suspensions and drop-outs?

**Question:** What are your plans for ensuring that North Carolina produces high school graduates ready to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy?

## Child Maltreatment

Each day, more than 350 of North Carolina's children are reported as abused or neglected. Far too many of our children are experiencing dangerous and damaging childhoods instead of safe, nurturing ones. By better understanding the scope of the problem we can better work toward all North Carolina children growing up in permanent, loving homes.

**Question:** What strategies do you support to recruit, train and retain foster and adoptive parents?

**Question:** Do you think the state could be doing more to prevent child abuse and neglect in the first place?

**Question:** What strategies will you employ to assist youth who are transitioning out of foster care into adulthood?



# Speak Out: Take Legislative Action!



# An Introduction to the N.C. General Assembly: Understanding the Legislative Process

**What is the structure of the N.C. General Assembly?** The General Assembly of North Carolina is made up of two chambers: the House of Representatives and the Senate.

- ★ All members of the General Assembly are elected by the voters from their respective districts.
- ★ The primary duties of the members are to introduce, amend and pass laws.

**How is the House of Representatives structured?** The House of Representatives consists of 120 members each of whom serve a term of two years.

- ★ The presiding officer of the House of Representatives is the Speaker of the House.
- ★ The Speaker is elected by members for a two-year term.
- ★ The Speaker's duties include maintaining order in the House and appointing members to the House standing committees.
- ★ The members also elect a Speaker Pro Tempore, who carries out the duties of the Speaker in his/her absence.

Who are your Representatives? Visit [www.ncga.state.nc.us/House/House.html](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/House/House.html).

**How is the Senate structured?** The Senate is composed of 50 members, each of whom serves a term of two years.

- ★ The Lieutenant Governor is the presiding officer of the Senate and is elected in a statewide election every four years.
- ★ The main duty of the Lieutenant Governor is to maintain order in the Senate.
- ★ Committee appointments in the Senate are made by the President Pro Tempore, who is elected by the members of the Senate from their membership.
- ★ If the Lieutenant Governor is absent, the President Pro Tempore carries out his or her duties.

Who are your Senators? Visit [www.ncga.state.nc.us/Senate/Senate.html](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/Senate/Senate.html)

**When is the General Assembly in session?** The General Assembly holds what is referred to as "*long session*" starting in January of odd numbered years (i.e., 2007) and "*short session*" starting in May of even numbered years (i.e., 2006). Sessions last until legislators have completed their necessary business—generally around July.

Source: N.C. General Assembly. Available at: [www.ncga.state.nc](http://www.ncga.state.nc).

# Planning a Visit to the Legislature

## Are tours of the Legislative Building available?

- ★ Yes. Tour guides lead a 30-minute tour for scheduled groups.
- ★ Information is also available for self-guided tours.

**For more information** call (919) 733-7929 (State Visitors' Services)

Monday through Friday 8:00 am until 5:00 pm; limited hours Saturdays and Sundays.

## Location:

The N.C. General Assembly

Legislative Building

16 West Jones Street

Raleigh, NC 27601

For directions, visit [www.ncleg.net/help/directions.html](http://www.ncleg.net/help/directions.html)

## Are visitors allowed to attend sessions of the Senate and House?

Yes. Public galleries are accessible from the second floor of the Legislative Building. Seating is on a first-come basis.

## Rules of the Legislative Gallery (located on the second floor of the Legislative Building):

- No applause
- No food and beverages
- No smoking
- No demonstrations (photography is allowed)
- The general public is not allowed on the floor of the House or Senate

For more information (i.e., current bills, committee hearings, how to contact your elected officials and more), visit the General Assembly website at [www.ncga.state.nc.us](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us).

## If I am planning a trip to the legislature, how can I visit my Representative and Senator?

It is best to contact your legislator ahead of time to schedule an appointment. During session, committee hearings are held and their schedules can be quite chaotic.

*In case you were wondering....*

- ★ Representatives meet Monday evenings and during the day on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. They spend their weekends with their families and are usually in their districts.



# How to Testify to a Legislative Committee

## "Open" Legislature

North Carolina has one of the most open legislatures in the country. A bill has a public hearing before Senate and House committees before being considered on the floor of the House and Senate. Your opportunity to testify comes at the committee hearings. If you cannot appear before a committee, contact your legislator making your opinion on a bill known. You can do so by writing a letter, sending an e-mail or by calling the legislator's Raleigh office.

## Where are committee hearings held?

Senate Committees and House Committees meet in either the Legislative Building or Legislative Office Building, located at 16 West Jones Street, Raleigh, NC. For a floor plan map of the legislative buildings, visit [www.ncleg.net/NCGAInfo/GA\\_Floor\\_Plans.pdf](http://www.ncleg.net/NCGAInfo/GA_Floor_Plans.pdf)

## How are committee hearings structured?

Legislative hearings are conducted informally. They are not judicial proceedings and the rules are somewhat relaxed. Anyone may testify; you do not need formal training.

To find out when a hearing is scheduled: click the Legislative Calendar, available at: [www.ncga.state.nc.us/LegislativeCalendar/](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/LegislativeCalendar/) to obtain an electronic copy of the weekly and daily schedules. You may also go to the Legislative Building, 16 West Jones Street, to get paper copies.

Inquire in person or by phone with the Legislative Information Center, 106 Legislative Building ((919) 733-7928). Subscribe to the Legislature's Committee E-mail Notification Service (Listserv), available at: [www.ncga.state.nc.us/gascripts/Committees/Committees.asp](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/gascripts/Committees/Committees.asp).

The Legislative Information Center also has copies of bills for distribution. Be sure to ask for any pending amendments or substitutes to particular bills.

### A Few Tips to Help You Prepare Before the Hearing:

- ★ **Are You a Lobbyist?** Generally, if you are testifying on a bill or issues and represent only yourself, you will not be required to register as a lobbyist.
- ★ **Prepare Your Remarks.** Time is usually limited, so be brief and direct. Written testimony should not be read at committee hearings. Writing your comments in outline form will be helpful when you speak, and you should summarize your written testimony.
- ★ **Avoid Duplication.** If other people will be offering similar testimony at the hearing, try to coordinate your testimony and avoid duplication. Well-organized testimony is the most effective.
- ★ **At the Meeting.**
  - \* Be punctual; usually there is only one public hearing at which testimony is taken on a particular bill.
  - \* Locate the sign-up sheet near the entrance of the hearing room and write your name and affiliation.

## How the Meeting is Conducted

Be present at the beginning of the hearing. The committee chair will open the hearing on a particular bill. Frequently, opening comments will be made by the bill's sponsor or by committee staff. Sometimes, however, the chair will ask for testimony from proponents and opponents immediately.

### The chair will organize the hearing to ensure:

- ★ that the committee members hear relevant information;
- ★ that interested persons are given the opportunity to express their opinions; and
- ★ that the hearing does not exceed the time available.

Most committee hearings are limited to two hours and may have several matters pending. The chair will attempt to be fair and provide each person an opportunity to testify. It may be necessary, however, to restrict testimony so that everyone is given an opportunity to express his or her opinions. You may be called to testify with others to save time.

## Making Your Remarks

1. Begin by introducing yourself to the chair and committee members and stating your purpose. For example:  
"Mr. or Madam Chair and members of the committee, I am \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_. I am here representing \_\_\_\_\_. I support this bill because . . ."
2. In your opening remarks, make it clear whether you are representing other citizens or a separate group.
3. Be brief and be sure your remarks are clear. You do not need to be nervous or worried about how you present your testimony.
4. Be prepared for questions and comments from committee members. These are designed to gain additional information, but don't answer if you are not sure of the answer. Tell the members you will send a written answer to the committee, and then follow through.
5. Be polite and professional when presenting your testimony. Demonstrations such as clapping, cheering and/or booing, are not appropriate during hearings.

# Federal Advocacy: A Brief Introduction

*In order to make the greatest impact possible in the lives of children and youth, state advocates also play a role at the federal, also called "national," level. If you want to get involved at the federal level, the same techniques used at the state level can be used to effectively advocate at the federal level.*

**Is it difficult to get in contact with federal representatives?** For the most part, communicating with Representatives and Senators in Washington, D.C., is very similar to communicating with state government representatives.

**Where can you obtain contact information for your federal representatives?** Visit Project Vote Smart's website at: [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org).

## **A few federal advocacy tips:**

***Join a coalition of state stakeholders.*** A coalition shows elected officials how much support there is for your issue and gives the impression that the state is speaking with a unified voice.

***Develop talking points to prepare for a meeting or call.*** Know the purpose of the meeting. Is it a general introductory meeting, are you informing the staffer about activities in the state or are you asking for specific legislative action? Develop talking points as a guide during the discussion.

***Request a meeting or conference call with the Congressman or the highest level staff possible.*** In order of importance, speak with the Congressman himself or herself, then the Chief of Staff, then the Legislative Director and then a Legislative Assistant.

***Encourage your Congressman to take a leadership role on your issue.*** Ask members of your Congressional delegation to connect with other members of Congress who serve on or chair a committee that has authority over the issue you are advocating.

***Build relationships with your Congressman's district and D.C. offices.*** Build relationships with staffers from both the district and D.C. offices because some staffers are more influential than others.

***Provide staff with a personalized, specific message.*** Consider using a story about a specific child or family (don't use last names for privacy reasons) in your state and include background data to help make a lasting impression. It helps to explain how the policy for which you are advocating will specifically affect the Congressman's state.

*Source: Voices for America's Children. Available at: [www.voicesforamericaschildren.org/Content/NavigationMenu/CAI/Advocacy\\_Tools/Federal\\_Advocacy\\_Tips/Federal\\_Advocacy\\_Tips.htm](http://www.voicesforamericaschildren.org/Content/NavigationMenu/CAI/Advocacy_Tools/Federal_Advocacy_Tips/Federal_Advocacy_Tips.htm)*



# Resources for Young Advocates



As a young adult, have you ever wondered how to get involved in civic engagement and outreach? Well, in North Carolina there are numerous organizations and agencies where you can speak up and speak out for the issues that concern you and your family. We have provided you with a list of some of these organizations.

### **Department of Administration: Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office**

The Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office (YAIIO) has a variety of programs designed to involve youth in civic engagement and outreach. For more information, contact the Youth Programs Coordinator at (919) 789-5880 and/or visit [www.doa.state.nc.us/yaio/](http://www.doa.state.nc.us/yaio/).

★ **N.C. Internship Council**

The N.C. Internship Council serves as the governing body of the State Government Internship Program. The Council determines the appropriateness of proposals for student intern projects, determines the number of interns to be placed per project, screens applications and selects interns.

★ **N.C. Youth Advisory Council (YAC)**

The YAC provides support and advice to the State Youth Council (SYC) and local youth councils. YAC is composed of adults and high school students. The council receives public and private gifts and donations for the N.C. Youth Endowment Fund, a public/private partnership trust fund for youth programs. It also administers the distribution of mini-grants to youth programs.

★ **State Youth Council (SYC)**

The SYC is comprised of teens from local youth councils across North Carolina. SYC provides opportunities for young people to be involved in local and state projects, participate in government, develop leadership skills and represent youth in civic activities.

★ **Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)**

The N.C. Students Against Destructive Decisions (formerly Students Against Driving Drunk) program assists young people in their schools and communities in conducting awareness programs to combat the use of drugs and alcohol. The program coordinates SADD chapters in middle and high schools, along with community colleges and four-year institutions of higher learning across the state. Presentations, training sessions, workshops and special events are held, including an annual statewide conference.

★ **Youth Legislative Assembly (YLA)**

YLA is a mock legislative session where high school students voice their opinions and vote on issues concerning local, state and national government. The three-day session is patterned after the N.C. General Assembly. At the conclusion, a final report is drafted and distributed to the governor and legislators. YLA is open to all North Carolina youth. The conference allows high school students to gain a better understanding and knowledge of local, state and national government as well as the confidence and ability to debate current issues. Any student in good standing at a public, private, charter or home school in North Carolina is eligible to participate in YLA. A limited number of scholarships are available to students based on need.

### **The American Legion Auxiliary of North Carolina**

PO Box 25726

Raleigh, NC 27611

Phone: (919) 832-4051

Fax: (919) 832-1888

E-mail: [ala1\\_nc@bellsouth.net](mailto:ala1_nc@bellsouth.net)

<http://nclegion.org/auxil.htm>

The American Legion develops and plans activities geared toward high school students and their development and understanding of the U.S. Government. The American Legion Auxiliary Tar Heel Girls' State Program (sponsored by the N.C. American Legion Auxiliary) is a program where young women across America participate in citizenship training at a weeklong session designed to mimic a state government. Delegates to Girls' Nation, another program run by the American Legion Auxiliary, participate in a mock national government to learn the importance of the individual in a democratic government. The American Legion also provides classes on flag etiquette as well as support for the Americanism Youth Freedoms Foundation.

### **The American Legion Department of North Carolina**

PO Box 26657  
Raleigh, NC 27611  
Phone: (919) 832-7506  
Fax: (919) 832-6428  
E-mail: [nclegion@nc.rr.com](mailto:nclegion@nc.rr.com)  
[www.nclegion.org/](http://www.nclegion.org/)

The American Legion develops and plans activities geared toward high school students and their development and understanding of the U.S. Government. One such program is The American Legion's National High School Oratorical Contest, which is used to help students develop a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the Constitution of the United States. Boys' State is another such participatory program where each participant becomes a part of the operation of his local, county and state government during a weeklong session. Following Boys' State, two representatives from each of the 48 Boys' State programs are called upon to represent their state at American Legion Boys' Nation in Washington, D.C. It is here that the young men are introduced to the structure and function of the federal government.

### **Generation Engage**

19 West Hargett Street  
Suite 604  
Raleigh, NC 27601  
E-mail: [Raleigh@GenerationEngage.org](mailto:Raleigh@GenerationEngage.org)  
[www.generationengage.org/](http://www.generationengage.org/)

Generation Engage is a nonpartisan youth civic engagement initiative that provides all young people with the knowledge, organization and voice they need to shape the future they will inherit. Generation Engage connects young Americans—particularly those who fall outside the boundaries of university campuses—to one another, to political leaders, to other civic organizations and to an ongoing debate about the issues that affect all of our lives.

### **Kids Voting North Carolina**

PO Box 29138  
Greensboro, NC 27429  
Phone: (336) 370-1776  
E-mail: [kvnc@bellsouth.net](mailto:kvnc@bellsouth.net)  
[www.kidsvotingnc.org/](http://www.kidsvotingnc.org/)

Buncombe County website at: <a href="http://www.kidsvotingbc.org/">www.kidsvotingbc.org/</a> Cumberland County website at: <a href="http://www.kidsvotingcc.org/">www.kidsvotingcc.org/</a> Guilford County website at: <a href="http://www.kidsvotingguilford.org/">www.kidsvotingguilford.org/</a> Mecklenburg County website at: <a href="http://www.kidsvoting.org/">www.kidsvoting.org/</a> Wake County website at: <a href="http://www.kidsvotingwake.org/">www.kidsvotingwake.org/</a>
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Kids Voting USA is a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that fosters an informed, participating electorate by educating and actively engaging young people and their families in voting and other elements of effective civic engagement.

### **N.C. Civic Education Consortium**

School of Government  
CB #3330 Knapp Building  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599  
Phone: (919) 966-5381  
Fax: (919) 962-0653  
<http://ncinfo.iog.unc.edu/programs/civiced/>

The Civic Education Consortium resides at the School of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and works to unite community partners, educators and children and youth to revitalize civic education for young North Carolinians. The Consortium sponsors a small grants program, disseminates curricula and other resources and coordinates projects.

### **The N.C. State Mock Trial Program**

N.C. Academy of Trial Lawyers  
PO Box 10918  
1312 Annapolis Drive  
Raleigh, NC 27605  
Phone: (919) 835-2808  
[http://ncatl.org/page/community\\_projects/](http://ncatl.org/page/community_projects/)  
[www.nationalmocktrial.org/](http://www.nationalmocktrial.org/)

The National High School Mock Trial Championship, Inc. is an annual competition, which allows students to experience and gain a full understanding of the law, court procedures and the American judicial system. The program also helps students become better critical thinkers, readers and speakers, as well as to improve communication among community members, teachers, government leaders and law professionals.

### **N.C. State University SAY Program**

Campus of N.C. State University  
Syme Residence Hall  
Raleigh, NC  
Phone: (919) 513-0795  
[www.ncsu.edu/housing/communities/say/index.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/housing/communities/say/index.php)

The College of Education and University Housing have partnered to provide a residential village housed on two floors of Syme Residence Hall at N.C. State University. The SAY residential village is committed to providing future advocates and educators with the resources, skills and support to become successful youth advocates and critical thinkers. They are looking for students who have an interest in contributing to the community, the university and the lives of youth.

### **N.C. Teen Court Association**

202 S. 8th Street  
Morehead City, NC 28557  
Phone: (252) 726-4632  
Fax: (252) 726-4632  
E-mail: [teencourt@starfishnet.com](mailto:teencourt@starfishnet.com)  
[www.youthcourt.net/](http://www.youthcourt.net/)

There are 40 youth court programs in the State of North Carolina. The goals of Teen Court are to help youth realize they will be accountable for their behavior; educate youth on the impact their actions have on themselves and others (i.e., victims and the community); build competencies among youth by providing instructions on how the legal system functions and how to communicate and resolve problems with peers more effectively; and provide a meaningful forum for youth to practice and enhance newly developed competencies.

### **N.C. Youth for Justice: Students Against Violence Everywhere (S.A.V.E.)**

322 Chapanoke Road, Suite 110  
Raleigh, NC 27603  
Phone: (919) 661-7800  
Fax: (919) 661-7777  
[www.nationalsave.org/](http://www.nationalsave.org/)

Students learn about alternatives to violence and practice what they learn through school and community service projects. As they participate in S.A.V.E. activities, students learn conflict management, mediation skills, the virtues of good citizenship, civility and nonviolence. Other programs supported by S.A.V.E are an LRE Institute for 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, We the People: Project Citizen and We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution, Street Law and Youth Summit.

### **Peace College**

The Leadership Studies Program  
15 East Peace Street  
Raleigh, NC 27604-1149  
Phone: (800) PEACE-47  
[www.peace.edu/prospective-students/leadership-studies.htm](http://www.peace.edu/prospective-students/leadership-studies.htm)

If you are a woman who desires to make a difference in the world and learn about yourself, then the Leadership Studies Program may be for you. The Leadership Studies Program encourages students to examine the philosophy, history and ethical dynamics of leadership while learning to be effective leaders themselves.

### **Public Allies North Carolina**

NCCU Department of Public Administration  
Whiting Criminal Justice Building, Room 318  
1801 Fayetteville Street  
Durham, NC 27707  
Phone: (919) 530-6622  
Fax: (919) 530-7977  
E-mail: [NorthCarolina@publicallies.org](mailto:NorthCarolina@publicallies.org)  
[www.publicallies.org/North\\_Carolina.aspx](http://www.publicallies.org/North_Carolina.aspx)

Public Allies encourages diverse young leaders to strengthen communities, nonprofits and civic participation. Public Allies envisions communities where people of different backgrounds, beliefs and experiences work together and share responsibility for improving their own lives and the lives of those around them.

### **Senate Page Program**

The N.C. General Assembly  
16 West Jones Street  
Raleigh, NC 27601-1096  
Phone: (919) 733-5649  
[www.ncga.state.nc.us/senate/pages/index.html](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/senate/pages/index.html)

The N.C. Senate Page Program affords youth of the state the opportunity to see firsthand how laws are made by participating in the legislative process. Young people help in individual Senators' offices, in committee meetings and during daily sessions for one-week terms when the General Assembly is in session.

Senate Pages are required to be between the ages of 15 (or 14 and currently in the ninth grade) and 18 years old, recommended by a member of the N.C. Senate and in good academic standing at school. In order to apply to be a Senate Page, a student must write or call his or her Senator (preferably in the district you live), request sponsorship to serve as page, complete the application and return the application to the sponsoring Senator for his or her signature.

### **Supporting Adolescents with Guidance and Employment (SAGE)**

Durham County Department of Social Services  
P.O. Box 810  
Durham, NC 27701  
Phone: (919) 560-8086

Supporting Adolescents with Guidance and Employment (SAGE) is a multifaceted, community-based violence-prevention program. Its target is African-American male adolescents in Durham, NC. SAGE includes an eight-month African-American Rites of Passage program (adult mentoring, African-American culture and history lessons, and manhood and conflict-resolution training), a six-week summer employment component and a 12-week entrepreneurial experience.

## **SAYSO**

SAYSO, Inc.  
411 Andrews Rd. Suite 230  
Durham, NC 27705  
Phone: (919) 384-1457  
Fax: (919) 384-0338  
E-mail: [Sayso@ilrinc.com](mailto:Sayso@ilrinc.com)  
[www.saysoinc.org/](http://www.saysoinc.org/)

SAYSO (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) is a statewide association of youth aged 14 to 24 who are or have been in the out-of-home care system in North Carolina.

## **We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution**

N.C. We the People Program	336 Meredith Street
1556 Old Halifax Road	Raleigh, NC 27606-1225
Zebulon, NC 27597	Phone: (919) 661-8704
Phone: (919) 496-5187	Fax: (919) 661-7777
Fax: (919) 496-3657	<a href="http://www.civiced.org">www.civiced.org</a>
<a href="http://www.civiced.org">www.civiced.org</a>	
<a href="http://www.ncbar.org/public/lis/programs/competition.aspx">www.ncbar.org/public/lis/programs/competition.aspx</a>	

We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution, a program funded by the U.S. Department of Education, teaches elementary, middle and high school students the history and principles behind the American constitutional democracy. The program's culminating activity is a simulated congressional hearing, wherein students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge while he or she evaluates, takes and defends positions on relevant historical and contemporary issues.

## **We the People: Project Citizen**

### **N.C. We the People Program**

6601 Whitefield Drive  
Willow Spring, NC 27592-7804  
Phone: (919) 661-7800

We the People: Project Citizen, administered at the middle school level, promotes competent and responsible participation in state and local governments. It actively engages young people in learning how to monitor and influence public policy. As a project, young people work together to create a portfolio related to a public policy issue that they have researched and documented. Classes may also enter their portfolios in a local showcase with other classes. Winners advance to annual state and national showcases. Project Citizen is administered nationally by the Center for Civic Education in cooperation with the National Conference of State Legislatures.

## **Youth Policy Action Center**

[www.youthpolicyactioncenter.org](http://www.youthpolicyactioncenter.org)

The Youth Policy Action Center is a website that engages young people (and adults) in democracy, changing policies that change young people's lives. The website features state-specific pages, an information clearinghouse, in-depth political tools and interactive features (including a blog, youth videos and social networking).



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Suite 500  
Raleigh, NC 27605-1276

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FAX 919.829.7299  
E-MAIL [admin@ncchild.org](mailto:admin@ncchild.org)

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Visit us online at

[www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org)

