



Alabama Chapter-AAP Member Action Tool: **A Step by-Step Blueprint for Hosting Legislators in Your Office/Professional Setting**

Updated June 2016

American Academy of Pediatrics
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



Alabama Chapter

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Each year, the Alabama Chapter-American Academy of Pediatrics hosts its Legislative Day in the spring in Montgomery in order to give member pediatricians an opportunity to learn more about the state legislative process and have face time with House and Senate lawmakers that represent us in the Alabama Legislature. The Chapter leadership encourages a stepwise approach for Chapter members to advocate directly to legislators in their districts outside of the Legislative Session in order to maximize our success and ability to have meaningful time with our lawmakers.

The focus of this blueprint is to offer step-by-step directions and tips on hosting a meeting in your professional setting—whether it's a private practice, hospital, clinic or health center. Hosting a meeting with a decision-maker, whether it is an elected official or a community leader, gives you a great opportunity to build a relationship and demonstrate firsthand the important issues facing children and families. It also provides a tangible way for decision-makers to see the important work you are doing and see for them how public policy and community initiatives affect children's health and well-being.

1 First, simply find out WHO your legislators are! You are represented by one house member and one senate member. *You* are in the best position to be their resource/local expert on child health. If you don't know who your lawmakers are, go to the Alabama Legislature web site to find out: <http://www.legislature.state.al.us/index.html>. Be sure to have your nine-digit zip code handy to know for sure who represents you. The web site lists the district contact information, which is what you will need to make contact with your legislator.

2 Set goals. Before inviting a decision-maker to meet you at your professional setting, determine your goals for the meeting. Ask yourself, "What do I want the lawmaker to do as a result of visiting my office/hospital?" and then plan your meeting around these goals. Identifying goals early on can help you make optimal use of your meeting. (See Step 4 for messaging.)

3 Consider timing and make contact. Try to schedule the visit during a time that is mutually convenient for both you and the decision-maker. If the decision-maker is an elected official, schedule the visit *before* the legislative session begins. Not only will this make it easier for the elected official to attend, but it can also help influence their commitment to your issue during the legislative session and also will build your relationship prior to the Chapter's Legislative Day. Don't be afraid to contact the legislator at his home telephone number. While some legislators use email, many do not and so it would be important to find out if he/she is a regular email user before you waste precious time in crafting an email.

4 Once you've scheduled your visit, contact the Chapter office. As a part of this new campaign, the Chapter Executive Office will be cataloguing these meetings so that we can measure the effectiveness of our effort. Please let the Chapter office know of your scheduled visit by completing your name, contact information, date of visit and name of legislator by logging this information here: <http://www.alaap.org/iform.asp?id=619>. In addition, please let your Area Representative know of your progress. A list of the Chapter's Area Representatives with their contact information can be found here: <http://www.alaap.org/board.asp>; click here for the corresponding map of the Chapter's areas: <http://www.contentedits.com/img.asp?id=22881>.

5 Recruit others from your professional setting, as well as others in your community, to participate: Reach out to other people in your professional setting and invite them to be part of the visit. This is a great way to demonstrate strength in numbers and give others the opportunity to contribute to your advocacy efforts. You are also encouraged to partner with other pediatricians in your community to co-host a meeting or event. In addition, the Chapter strongly encourages you to find members of the business community who are willing to be part of your event. Business leaders have strong connections and may even be able to help you make contact with your legislator. Naturally, you will want to make sure that the business leader is on board with your goals, and you will want to maintain full control of the meeting.

6 Keep on message. Based on your goals, determine what message you want the decision-maker to hear from you and others involved in the visit. Your message should be concise and easily understood; be sure everyone who is participating—including other pediatricians, any business leaders in attendance, and of course, the lawmaker—understands your message and can articulate it. To help you with your messaging, go to the “Current Issues” page on the Chapter website for the latest legislative agenda, talking points and fact sheets: <http://www.alaap.org/showandtell.asp?id=77719>.

While the Chapter encourages you to make use of the talking points and handouts for lawmakers, naturally *you* must ultimately decide what your messaging will be.

7 Make the visit personal: One of the most important aspects of inviting decision-makers to your professional setting is the opportunity to let them see firsthand how your issue affects children and families in the community. Incorporate different opportunities to illustrate your story and make the visit personal, such as a tour of the children’s ward or the chance to talk to a patient and their family.

8 Include an “ask.” A personal visit from a decision-maker to your professional setting can be very influential. Be sure to make the most of this interaction by incorporating a specific request for action into your meeting. This could include asking the decision-maker to support specific policy that relates to your issue or participating in your next community health fair.

9 Plan for visibility: Strongly consider inviting the media to attend the visit. Having decision-makers there increases the likelihood of your issue being covered, and in turn, letting the lawmaker know that you will be contacting the media will encourage them to accept your invitation; leaders appreciate positive publicity! If you do not invite the media, plan to take photos and include them with an article in your newsletter or other communication. Need help getting started on inviting the local media? Call the Chapter office at 334-954-2543.

10 Allow a chance for questions: The decision-maker will likely have questions for you or others in your professional setting. Invite questions and answer them honestly. If you don’t know the answer, let them know you will get back to them. Put together a packet of information that the legislator can take with him/her, including information about your professional setting, your patients, and the issue you care about (see Chapter handouts on the legislative page: <http://www.alaap.org/showandtell.asp?id=77719>).

11 Tout Legislative Day: If you know the date of the next Pediatric Legislative Day, be sure to let the lawmaker know that you will be attending and ask him/her if you can follow up with him on that day. Use your best judgment on whether it makes sense to set up a time now or handle that in your follow-up. If for some reason you cannot attend Legislative Day, please invite him/her to attend anyway and offer another time when you can follow up.

12 Stay on schedule. You and your decision-maker both have busy and demanding schedules. Keep the length of the visit—whether you agreed to 20 minutes or an hour—within the predetermined time frame. The Chapter encourages visits of no longer than 30 minutes.

13 Follow-up. Be sure to keep in touch with the decision-maker after the visit. Send him/her a thank-you and invite him/her to events that your professional setting is involved with, such as community health fairs, conferences, or forums. Consider adding the legislator to your practice/clinic’s mailing list or e-mail list.