Engaging Policymakers: What to Know

- Know your audience
- Know the context
- Know your message
- Know how to build coalitions
- Know how to use the media
Know Your Audience

Who are the policymakers? Who sets the rules?

- Legislators (Federal, State, Local)
- Administrations (Federal, State, Local)
- Employers (workplace, community)
- Community groups (unions, clubs, groups)
- Families (school, community)
- Others – churches, institutions, etc.
Know the Context

- What are the key concerns, motivations, or interests of your audience?
- Where does your issue fit among their existing priorities?
- Where will the potential opposition come from?
- What is the timeframe? Are key dates involved or approaching?
Know Your Message

- Substantive expertise is the starting point
- Messages should be concise – brief and clear, and clever if possible
  - Back to Sleep
  - Stop, Drop and Roll
- Why should policymakers care about your issue?
  - Statistics
  - Economics
  - Community interest/importance
  - Personal stories
Know How to Build Coalitions

- **Who are your natural allies?**
  - Pediatricians
  - Parents and families
  - Schools and child care centers
  - Other health care providers
  - Hospitals and health care facilities
  - Community organizations
  - Families whose children have suffered preventable injuries
Know How to Build Coalitions

- Who are your “strange bedfellows”?
  - Employers
  - Insurance companies
  - AARP, senior organizations, senior centers
  - Celebrities (including local ones!)
  - Businesses, banks, retailers
  - Foundations, charitable organizations
Know How to Use the Media

- Educate the public
- Build pressure on policymakers
- Draw attention to new or ongoing efforts
- Advance a campaign
- Use many forums
  - TV (news programs, local cable stations)
  - Radio (PSAs)
  - Print (news stories, op-eds, LTEs, newsletters, flyers, business publications)
  - Online (websites, blogs, local or regional interest sites)
Federal Case Study: GDL law

- Audience: Congressional sponsors of existing GDL bill, committees of jurisdiction
- Context: Building support to add GDL incentive grants to transportation reauthorization bill in 2009
- Message: GDL saves lives
- Coalition: Worked with Advocates for Highway & Auto Safety, law enforcement, SADD, families, etc.
- Media: press conferences, letters to Congress, etc.
I attended an AAP Chapter Advocacy Summit and heard a session put on by an attorney general. I was surprised to hear how many great advocacy stories came from attorneys general and decided to make an appointment to go visit mine when I returned from the summit.

Danette Glassy, MD, FAAP
Mercer Island Pediatric Associates, Mercer Island, WA
Our attorney general was very excited to meet us. She told us she was investigating school violence from the perspective of children. She had toured the country interviewing middle school and high school students about why they thought there was school violence. They felt the bullying of troubled kids was what pushed them over the edge to school violence.

Danette Glassy, MD, FAAP
Mercer Island Pediatric Associates, Mercer Island, WA
State Case Study: School Violence

She was contemplating what we could do as a state to help reduce bullying when we came to visit. I told her that I had read several recent articles in pediatric literature about reducing bullying because it led to a lot of somatic problems for kids and even depression and suicide. She told me she was forming a task force to put together legislation to help schools deal with this problem and asked me to head this task force.

Danette Glassy, MD, FAAP
Mercer Island Pediatric Associates, Mercer Island, WA
State Case Study: School Violence

Over the next several months, the task force met and fashioned a bill to have schools educate and address bullying from elementary school through high school. In the second year it was introduced, it was passed. Now all of the public schools in the state of Washington are required to educate students, parents, and staff about bullying, and adopt a zero tolerance for bullying in their schools. The task force was even able to create a sample curriculum and policy for schools to use.

Danette Glassy, MD, FAAP
Mercer Island Pediatric Associates, Mercer Island, WA
Local Case Study: Bike Helmets

My first venture into state advocacy resulted from a patient of mine who suffered a skull fracture following a fall from a bicycle, resulting in neurosurgical intervention. After my patient’s mother asked why there was no law requiring young children to wear helmets, we embarked on a campaign to introduce legislation in the Illinois General Assembly.

Mark Rosenberg, MD, FAAP
Children’s Healthcare Associates, Chicago, IL
Local Case Study: Bike Helmets

While we were unsuccessful in enacting a state law, we did pass a municipal ordinance in the town of Barrington, IL—the first in the state—to require bicycle helmets on children.

Mark Rosenberg, MD, FAAP
Children’s Healthcare Associates, Chicago, IL
AAP Chapter Advocacy – Your Issues Are Our Issues

- Pediatricians are organized on the state level in state chapters

- AAP chapters are the “boots on the ground” for AAP advocacy initiatives on the state level

- AAP chapters are extensively involved in legislative advocacy work and enjoy long-standing ties with key policymakers
AAP Chapter Advocacy – Your Issues Are Our Issues

- **Child Passenger Safety**
  - First car seat requirement passed in TN following advocacy work by state AAP chapter; now all states have followed their lead

- **Child Death Investigations –**
  - In PA, the AAP chapter administers the program on behalf of the state; pediatricians leaders from AAP state chapters chair and serve on many state or local child death review panels.

- **Graduated Drivers Licensing**
  - AAP chapters were instrumental in enactment of laws restricting teen driving hours and requiring additional behind the wheel experience
AAP Chapter Advocacy – Your Issues Are Our Issues

- **Safety Helmets** –
  - AAP Chapters were among earliest proponents of bike helmet use by children; laws in 20 states have helped to establish national social norms regarding helmet use by both children and their parents

- **Child Product Safety** –
  - AAP chapters have successfully lobbied for toy/crib safety laws, and limits on lead and other toxic substances in toys and other child products

- Beyond injury prevention and safety issues, AAP chapters are engaged and active in every aspect of child health policy on the state level, from Medicaid and CHIP to immunizations, tobacco control, and more
Conclusions

- Think about advocacy with policymakers broadly – don’t restrict yourself needlessly
- As state employees, your ability to influence legislation may be limited, but you can form partnerships with those who can carry your message
- Pediatricians are critical allies in your work
  - Contact the AAP Division of State Government Affairs at 800.433.9016 or at stgov@aap.org to get connected with the AAP chapter in your state
- AAP policy can provide vital support
  - AAP policy website: http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/
  - AAP Advocacy site: http://www.aap.org/advocacy.html