

Engaging with Policy Makers 101

Understanding Policymakers

Elected officials are responsible for a wide range of issues. They rely on constituents like you to help them understand what's happening on the ground—especially in fields like family child care (FCC), where technical, economic, and human realities intersect.

What They Need from You:

- Clear, accurate information
- Personal stories that humanize an issue
- Solutions and recommendations they can support
- Data that demonstrates scale and urgency

Remember: You are the expert in your field. You live the impact of policy decisions every day.

Best Practices for Meeting with Policymakers

1. Do Your Research

- Know the policymaker's background, committee assignments, and past positions.
- Understand the level of government you're engaging (city, state, federal) and what authority they have over your issue.
- Bring relevant local or national data (e.g., NAFCC survey results) and real-life examples.

Example: If you're meeting a state legislator on the education committee, highlight how FCC programs are supporting school readiness and meeting local child care needs.

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2. Prepare Key Messages

Stick to three core talking points. For FCC issues, this might be:

1. Family child care educators are skilled small business owners providing essential early education.
2. The field is in crisis due to low compensation, limited benefits, and funding gaps.
3. We need policy solutions that support retention, startup, and sustainability.

Include one compelling story, one relevant statistic, and one concrete ask (e.g., "Please support House Bill 1022 to increase subsidy rates.")

3. Build Relationships

- Start with a thank you for their public service or past support.
- Offer yourself as a resource—someone they can turn to for insight on child care and family issues.
- Follow up regularly and stay connected, even outside of "asks."

Tip: Relationships lead to results. Consistent, respectful engagement builds trust and influence over time.

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Writing Effective Letters or Emails

Structure of an Effective Message:

Identify yourself: Include your name, city/town, and role (e.g., “I’m a licensed FCC educator in Durham.”)

State the issue clearly: What policy or problem are you writing about?

Share a personal story: This brings the issue to life.

Use data to show the broader impact (e.g., “55% of FCC educators report income loss after ARPA expiration.”)

Make a clear request: “Please co-sponsor the Child Care for Working Families Act.”

Additional Tips:

- Keep it short (1 page max)
- Be respectful and professional
- If handwritten, ensure it’s legible and neat

Follow up with a thank-you email and offer to be a point of contact on the issue.

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Testifying at Hearings

Purpose:

Testimony is your opportunity to influence legislation, educate decision-makers, and add a human voice to policy debates.

Types of Testimony:

- Oral Testimony: Delivered in person, often with a time limit (e.g., 2–5 minutes)
- Written Testimony: A longer, more detailed written statement that becomes part of the public record

Crafting Effective Testimony

1. Start with who you are

“Good morning, Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is [Name], and I run a licensed family child care program in [City/State]. I’ve been in this work for 15 years, and I serve families across all income levels.”

2. Describe the issue and its impact

Use a mix of storytelling and data.

“Despite working over 50 hours a week, I take home less than \$15/hour—just like 52% of FCC educators across the country.”

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3. Make a clear policy recommendation

“I urge you to support [Bill/Program], which would [describe briefly what it does and how it helps].”

4. Close with a strong statement

“I believe every child deserves access to quality care, and every educator deserves to make a living wage. Thank you for your time and leadership.”

Best Practices for Testifying

- Practice aloud—time yourself to stay within limits
- Bring printed copies (written testimony, data handouts)
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Anticipate questions from committee members
- Stay calm and confident—you are the expert of your story

What Makes Advocacy Effective?

- ✓ Authenticity – Speak from the heart
- ✓ Repetition – Deliver the same key message across different platforms
- ✓ Collaboration – Join coalitions and associations (like NAFCC)
- ✓ Consistency – Keep showing up, even when the policy process is slow

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Research Behind These Strategies

- According to the Congressional Management Foundation, constituent meetings (97%) and personalized letters (94%) have the highest impact on undecided lawmakers.
- Stories combined with data are more persuasive than either alone (Harvard Kennedy School, 2017).
- Lawmakers are more likely to support legislation when they hear directly from affected constituents, especially small business owners and local leaders.

You do not need to be a policy expert to engage in advocacy. You just need to be clear, credible, and committed.

The personal experiences of FCC educators—combined with real-time data like the NAFCC Annual Survey—are powerful tools for change.