



Advocacy Tips for Budget Hearings

- WHERE:** The Richmond area hearing will be in Petersburg this year at Virginia State University.
- WHEN:** Friday, January 4, 2013. The hearing will start at noon. The line to sign up to speak will start forming hours earlier. Be prepared to wait, and consider having someone else sign you up. (Many CSBs, private providers, and advocacy organizations arrange this for you.)
- RULES:** If the rules are the same this year, each speaker will get 3 minutes—strictly enforced—and could possibly get cut to 2 minutes toward the end of the hearing. Someone else can sign you up to speak, but each person in line can only sign up one speaker.
- WHO:** You will be testifying in front of legislators who are members of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees who are from this area of the state. Those committees have the power to suggest amendments to the state budget the Governor proposes, and the full General Assembly will vote on those changes.

How to Prepare to Testify

- Write out your testimony and practice giving it while being timed- stay under 3 minutes! It is also more effective if you are not simply reading, but are able to make some eye contact with the legislators.
- Start by thanking them for the attention they have paid to the issue in the past or previous positive funding decisions they have made—or simply for the opportunity to be heard that day.
- Be personal. Share an aspect of your experience that relates to the change you are asking for.
- Use statistics sparingly. Facts and figures can be very effective if you limit them to one or two. Do not overwhelm them with numbers.
- Be specific. Make sure the legislators know what action you are looking for (please restore the funding cut proposed by the Governor, please add funding for waiver slots, etc.)
- Be respectful and polite! You can be a strong advocate while still being respectful of those with whom you do not always agree.

- Do not be discouraged if legislators come and go during the hearing. They will be sitting there for many hours without an official break.
- **If several people before you have already testified on the same subject, legislators will appreciate it if you shorten your comments to state your agreement with a previous speaker and only add what is different in your testimony from the other people's.**
- An effective way to show broad support for an issue is to have one or two people testify and ask the rest of your supporters to stand.
- Relax! Legislators are just people. And they are very sympathetic to human service issues, even if they don't always fund them at the levels we would like. You are not going to be questioned by them at a budget hearing.

How to Prepare to Talk to a Reporter

Reporters from the major newspapers and some television and radio stations report on the budget hearings. If you would like to talk to a reporter, be prepared to answer these questions:

- Why are you there?
- What specific action are you asking the legislators to take?
- What is the aspect of your personal experience that leads you to ask for this?

You will want to be brief and to the point. Keep your message simple. Practice your main points ahead of time.

Everyone has much more life experience with the issue than they are able to share with a reporter who is pressed for time and just needs a few sound bites. So be sure to think ahead of time about what aspect of your experience is most relevant to the funding request you are making.

Example:

"I am here today to help lawmakers understand that we need more community-based services for children with mental health disorders. Specifically, they need to fund crisis response and child psychiatry services in every region of the state. Here's why: My 9-year-old daughter is diagnosed with bipolar disorder. We had to wait 12 weeks to see a child psychiatrist because the demand is so high. Within two weeks of making the appointment, my daughter's condition deteriorated and she had to be hospitalized. We could have avoided that family trauma and the two weeks of missed school if there were better access to mental health services like child psychiatry and mobile crisis teams in my community."



Advocacy Tips for the General Assembly

GET READY...

Find out who your legislators are: Go to <http://viriniageneralassembly.gov/> (new site) and click on the link at the very top that says "Click for Bill tracking, Meetings, Who's My Legislator?"

Connect with advocacy organizations on your issue: For children's issues, go to Voices' websites (www.vakids.org and/or www.1in5kids.org) and sign up to receive our emails throughout session, giving you updates and advocacy opportunities. For other issues, you can connect with NAMI Virginia (www.namivirginia.org), The ARC of Virginia (www.thearcofva.org/), or your CSB or private provider for information on the issues of interest to you.

GET SET...

Contact your legislators to make appointments: Visiting your legislators when they are NOT in session is the most effective way to get their full attention. It is often effective to go in a small group with other families or advocates, and prepare a one-page document of talking points to leave with them. It can be valuable to meet with a legislative aide if the legislator is not available.

It is also effective to visit your legislators DURING session, but just know that you will not get as much time, and you are more likely to get time with an aide than with a legislator. But calling ahead for an appointment and telling the secretary you are a constituent (or group of constituents) is helpful.

GO!

- **Meet with your legislators in their home offices in December.**
- **Testify at the January 4, 2013 Budget Hearing in Petersburg.**
- **Attend the Coalition rally on Martin Luther King Day (January 21) at the Capitol,** and then go talk to your legislators in the General Assembly Building.
- **Attend Children's Mental Health Advocacy Day, January 24, at the General Assembly Building.** Gather with fellow advocates at a breakfast for legislators and then meet with your legislators. More information will be available on www.1in5kids.org.
- **Email or call your legislators during session to let them know the issues that are important to you.** If you sign up for advocacy alerts from one or more organizations, you will know specific times when calls and emails are especially helpful.