Legislative Advocacy 101

Moving Your Agenda Forward at the State Level

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Achieving Policy Changes at the State Level:

- State campaign to eliminate the TANF asset limit test

- Thinking through the process – early decisions, during the campaign, taking the vote

- Navigating the political process – things to remember
Eliminating the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Asset Test in Illinois

- Attempted to eliminate the asset test administratively (’04 – ’09); introduced legislation in 2013
- Reasons for the campaign:
  - Illinois already removed asset limits on SNAP and Medicaid
  - Asset limits force families to deplete emergency savings, serves as a barrier to building savings, and are counter-productive to the goals of the program
  - Administrative costs associated with conducting asset tests (not good for a cash-strapped state)
- Introduced identical bills in the IL House and Senate
Eliminating the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Asset Test in Illinois cont.

• Ran an “under the radar” campaign
  – Focus on cost-savings
  – Minimal media because of the stigma attached to welfare recipients in Illinois
  – Worked with experts on the issue – got support from the IDHS

• In one year, successfully passed the bill out of both chambers
  – signed into law in summer of 2013

• Illinois is now one of 8 states to have eliminated the TANF asset test
### Early Decisions – things to consider at the start of the legislative process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s your Best Option</th>
<th>Writing the Bill</th>
<th>Choosing a Sponsor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Legislation?</td>
<td>• Pull language from other states</td>
<td>• Expert</td>
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<td>• Administrative Rules?</td>
<td>• Use a model law</td>
<td>• Champion</td>
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<td>• Ballot Initiative?</td>
<td>• Use language from a previously attempted bill</td>
<td>• Politically Advantageous</td>
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<td>• Choosing co-sponsors (create a diverse and rounded list)</td>
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Early decisions continued...

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<th>Type of Campaign</th>
<th>Materials</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Grassroots</td>
<td>• Fact Sheets &amp; FAQs</td>
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<td>• “Under the Radar”</td>
<td>• Internal Talking Points</td>
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<td>• This can change as the campaign develops</td>
<td>• List of Endorsements</td>
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Thousands of bills are introduced each session – you have a lot of control over how you present your bill and how legislators learn about it.
Things to consider during the campaign:

**Tailoring Your Message**
- What are legislators responding to?
- What are your opponents saying?
- What questions are you getting?
- What is the public saying?

**Committee**
- Assignment to a good committee
- Work the committee roll call
- Who’s going to testify
- Any new materials for members?

**Compromises & Amendments**
- Know what your bottom line is
- Engage the right stakeholders (opponents and supporters)
- Leverage support for changes whenever possible
The final steps:

• Keep track of your opposition
  – Have their arguments changed? Are they focusing in on key votes? Are they generating calls/emails/letters?

• Celebrate the mini victories – keeps momentum going and generates positive energy

• Keep track of the legislative calendar (knowing that there are always exceptions – at least in Illinois)

• Triple check your roll call – and give yourself a buffer if possible
General things to remember

• Most of the time, lobbying a legislator is the same as educating a legislator

• Get to know your legislators and meet them where they’re at
  – In-district meetings
  – Research and fact sheets specific to their district and constituents

• Capitalize on the politics and take advantage of the process

• Celebrate victories along the way (committee vote, new co-sponsors, passage out of one chamber, etc.)

• Build a host of allies – both traditional and non-traditional

• Be present and be persistent!

• Remember to thank your legislators