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2014 NCRC ANNUAL CONFERENCE
MARCH 12-15, 2014
CAPITAL HILTON HOTEL • WASHINGTON, DC
www.ncrc.org/conference/

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:

What's your Best Option

- Legislation?
- Administrative Rules?
- Ballot Initiative?

Writing the Bill

- Pull language from other states
- Use a model law
- Use language from a previously attempted bill

Choosing a Sponsor

- Expert
- Champion
- Politically Advantageous
- Choosing co-sponsors (create a diverse and rounded list)

Early decisions continued…

Type of Campaign

- Grassroots
- “Under the Radar”
- This can change as the campaign develops

Materials

- Fact Sheets & FAQs
- Internal Talking Points
- List of Endorsements

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 pubic 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