

## INTRODUCTION

### YOU ARE THE EXPERT!

#### CITIZEN ADVOCATES

When you consider talking to a legislator, it is not unusual to feel a bit anxious and nervous. You may think, “Why would he (or she) listen to me?”

But in fact you are the person that legislators most want to hear from --- real people who can describe how a policy or law actually plays out in every day situations. If you or a family member have AD/HD and are affected by these laws, you are exactly the right expert to inform the legislative process. You have more information on what is really needed and how current law really works, even though you are brand new to advocacy. And if you vote in the district of the legislator, you become an even more credible advocate.

**ADVOCACY** is about speaking about the reality of your life or that of your child’s and/or family member’s life and your need to educate the individuals make decisions so that they can make good, fair decisions.

#### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO ADVOCATE?

While this training manual can give you the tools to help you advocate more effectively, you carry your single most powerful tool with you – your personal story. Nothing is as effective as the person who can communicate their story and give a face to an issue for a policymaker. In general, you can expect that a legislator does not know much about your issue and what is important to you and your family. Unless your issue comes to their attention and grabs their personal interest, your issue is just one of many. And, unless a legislator has the personal experience – gets to know persons with AD/HD, meets children or adults with AD/HD, or has a family member or a friend with AD/HD (or another disability/disorder), the world of disability issues is faceless and abstract.

It is the advocate’s job to give the issue(s) a face – to make it personal. To do this, sharing your personal story is vital. Once your issue(s) gets the personal attention of an elected official, school board member, or the press, you have a much better chance of getting appropriate action.

## **FINDING A COMMON CAUSE:**

Anytime you can join forces with others with similar concerns, you increase your chance of effectiveness enormously. There are places where member organizations differ. But there are also many places where organizations agree. When you are able to find common ground, your work will be that much more powerful because of the strength in numbers.

## **IT'S YOUR JOB:**

There are many organizations who work for good public policy for persons with disabilities. But they can only do so much. You are the person who can put a face on an issue. And if you don't do it – the likelihood is that no one will do it for you!

## **WHAT ARE YOUR CONCERNS ABOUT BECOMING AN ADVOCATE?**

### **Issues could include:**

- **Not knowing enough about the issues.**  
This is a matter of education. CHADD can help you come up to speed. Check out the Public Policy section of our website at [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org) . You can also contact our Director of Public Policy at (301) 306-7070 ext.109 or email [publicpolicy@chadd.org](mailto:publicpolicy@chadd.org).
- **Not knowing the ropes at the Legislature or in State agencies.**  
Again, a matter of education.
- **Not having the necessary contacts.**  
You can find out who to talk to about your issue. Think about others who are affected by your concerns and what state group might represent their concerns. CHADD frequently works with other groups such as:

Mental Health America (Mental Health Association)  
NAMI  
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
Children and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation  
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists  
American Academy of Pediatricians  
National Medical Association  
National Association of School Psychologists  
Parent Teachers Association  
National Association of School Counselors  
And many more...

Each one of these groups has local or state affiliates. We can help you identify experts or partners who might want to join with you in your efforts.

- **Not understanding that one voice can make a difference.**  
One voice *can* make a difference. Only *you* can tell your story.
- **Not having the needed skills.**  
This manual will help you with the basics. A lot of it comes with practice.
- **Not having the money.**  
While money could help with just about everything, you can do a good job of advocating without spending lots of dollars.

Take a look at the cartoon *“How a Bill Becomes Law”* on the next page. Without citizen advocates, this is what happens all too often. A good and well intended idea becomes a poor law with unintended negative consequences. Get involved and help to steer legislation positively for people with AD/HD.

And remember --- ***You are the Expert!*** That is the basis for this manual – to give *you* the tools to advocate for the causes important to you!