

How Do I Become An Effective Advocate For Brain Injury Issues?

Tom Grady, Director of Advocacy & Public Affairs

One person has a concern about a bill that will repeal the no-fault system of auto insurance. Another is concerned that her son may not receive services from the Traumatic Brain Injury Medicaid Waiver program. Yet another wants to see children under the age of 14 wear helmets while skiing. These people are very concerned about these issues, but may not know how to effectively advocate or present their case to a state or federal lawmaker.

Meeting with a lawmaker may be awkward for some, scary for others, or invigorating for the seasoned advocate. Whatever the advocacy skill level of a person is, he / she can make their meeting more effective if they practice the following advocacy tips.

First, register for the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey's Legislative Network. By joining the network, you will receive timely news about state and federal brain injury issues, plus other useful information for your advocacy efforts.

Second, visit the Association's Public Policy page. Here, you will find information related to advocacy including more tips on interacting effectively with lawmakers. You can find the Public Policy page at www.bianj.org/hwch.html and then clicking on "Public Policy."

Third, learn how to organize and present an effective argument. Develop a key message which includes a clear definition of the problem, or goal, accompanied by objective facts. There should also be an emotional component to the message. Brain injury stories awaken powerful emotions in people. The message must be short, and to-the-point. Specify the action you want the lawmaker to take. The lawmaker needs to understand why it is important he / she act in a certain way. Ensure the lawmaker has your contact information.

Fourth, when speaking with legislators and/or aides, be honest and think of yourself as an educator, guide or counselor to them. They need your input to make effective decisions.

Fifth, be personable. Call the lawmakers' office or write a personalized letter. A lawmaker sometimes brings the most moving stories or letters with him / her when it is time to vote on a bill.

Advocating for a cause or issue can be easy, effective and efficient if you have the right tools, knowledge and skill. For more information on advocating effectively and/or joining the Legislative Network, visit our website at www.bianj.org or contact Tom Grady, Director of Advocacy & Public Affairs, at (732) 745-0200, extension 233, or at tgrady@bianj.org.