



Advocacy 101: Every Voice Makes a Difference

Each fall, we gear up for the coming session of the Washington State Legislature. The 2020 session convenes on Monday, January 13. The 2020 regular session will last for 60 days, and there is a lot to get done!

Every voice makes a difference. And whether someone can do a lot or a little, sometimes the biggest hurdle is getting started. So, here's a quick-and-easy overview of how you can advocate for Aging Network programs and services and other issues that you hold near and dear.

Step 1: Identify your legislators and get to know them

You may already know one, two, or all three of the people elected to represent you in the state legislature. In addition, be sure you have current contact information and know how to track their priorities and their voting records.

If you do not know your state legislators or want to check current contact information, visit **District Finder** (<https://bit.ly/2HBIGQP>) and enter your street address. Your district map will appear, along with all three names, mailing addresses, phone numbers, and links to their webpages (while there, sign up for their e-newsletters or e-mail updates). Bookmark this information for future reference.

If you use social media like Twitter and Facebook, go to those apps and search for your legislators' pages. While most legislators have accounts clearly indicating their elected status, some do not. You may wish to "Follow" and "Like" their official page, if they have one, so you can follow along and easily

find them later. If they don't have a page as an elected official, you may wish to connect with them on their private pages. I advise against using a page that appears to be related only to campaign activity, as it may not be monitored closely during the legislative session. If your legislator is new, there may be a delay in setting up an official page but it's likely to happen, so plan to check back.

Step 2: Learn about current issues in your field of interest

Aging Network advocates have numerous ways to learn about legislative issues:

- Attend town hall meetings, which you will learn about by subscribing to your legislators' e-news (see previous section).
- Participate in strategy meetings and forums hosted by organizations with similar views to your own (e.g., Area Agency on Aging Advocacy Committee meetings and Washington Senior Lobby monthly meetings in Lacey).
- Connect with other community-based advocacy organizations that have related agendas (e.g., Alzheimer's Association—WA, Hearing Loss Association—WA, SEIU 775).
- Attend community meetings where you can network with others who live in your legislative district.

Many organizations post their legislative priorities online in the days and weeks leading up to each legislative session. Following is a small sample of useful advocacy links that you can bookmark now and return to find updated information in 2020:

- **AARP Washington** (<https://bit.ly/2PaCTUP>)
- **Washington Association of Area Agencies on Aging** (<https://bit.ly/2GDgwC8>)
- **Washington State Council on Aging** (<https://bit.ly/1FinxAj>)
- **Washington State Senior Lobby** (<https://bit.ly/35SNBVX>)

It's also advisable to learn some of the basics about people served in your legislative district, city, or county. Your Area Agency on Aging can provide age-related population data, information on current programs and services, and strategies they've identified and posted in their Four Year Plan.

Finally, when you want information about a specific piece of legislation and its status, you can use this handy **Bill Summary** portal (<https://bit.ly/2Jf2RTj>), provided by the Washington State Legislature. Search for a specific bill by number or search by topic.

Step 3: Build your advocacy network

If you have made the connections recommended in the previous steps, your advocacy network is already started. Don't stop there—invite family, friends, and neighbors to get on board, too. Share what you learn. Ask if you can count on them to contact their state legislators when the time is right. Make a list of your personal contacts with whom you share advocacy (dare I say political) views, along with their contact information—phone, e-mail, and social media.

Step 4: Develop your message

At this point, you've probably got several reasons for contacting your state legislators. Write a couple ideas down. Keep your messages simple and as concise as possible. Provide a personal story when you can—stories matter—but if time doesn't allow for that, you can still send a message—in person, by phone, by e-mail and/or on social media. Numbers count—on many occasions, legislators have been known to wave a handful of letters, cards, and messages in the air to show support or opposition to a specific issue within their constituent ranks.

Step 5: Contact your legislators and let them know what you think

During the legislative session, there are lots of ways to contact your legislators that do not require significant time or resources:

- **Call the toll-free Legislative Hotline 1-800-562-6000**—leave one message for your senator and two representatives. It's quick and easy—state your district number, name, and street address along with a succinct message such as *“Please support Senate Bill xxxx, which would <do what>.”*
- **E-mail your legislator(s)**—easy and no cost, with the added advantage of allowing for your personal reasons for supporting or opposing specific legislation.
- **Mail a card or letter**—it can be useful to provide physical evidence that people are contacting their representatives in Olympia.
- **Tweet your message to your legislators**, if they use Twitter (see Step 1, above). You can use Facebook for this purpose, too, but studies show that Twitter has more widespread use for advocacy purposes. For tips on using social media for advocacy, read “10 Tasks for Effective Legislative Advocacy” in the December 2017 issue of AgeWise (<https://bit.ly/31yuQDz>).
- **Visit Olympia during session**—you'll find useful trip planning information on **Coming to the Legislature** (<https://bit.ly/2MAbZ6V>). It's great to have an appointment. If you cannot get an appointment with one of your legislators, ask to meet with their legislative assistant. Be prepared—know your message, take background information if available, and leave a personal note if necessary. If you do meet with a legislator, take a photo, which you can use on social media later (adding your thanks for their time, no matter



what the outcome of the discussion) or e-mail with a thank you message.

- **Participate as part of a larger group**—there’s power in numbers! Also, it may be easier if your advocacy journey includes a friend or kindred spirit. The **2020 Washington State Senior Lobby Day** is Thursday, February 20 (<https://bit.ly/35SNBVX>). There are numerous related advocacy days, including the **Alzheimer’s Association’s 2020 Advocacy Day** on Tuesday, February 18 (<https://bit.ly/2HsDWwR>).

Step 6: Repeat as necessary

Advocacy is an iterative process. I’ve heard it said that, on average, it takes three years of advocacy to start something new. Also, many fund sources that we depend upon to support older people, adults with disabilities, and caregivers are reconsidered annually or biennially. That means we keep going back.

Once you’ve established a relationship with your state legislators, keep it alive. Send notes of appreciation when you can. Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper. Attend district gatherings. Consider hosting a coffee hour and inviting a legislator to speak.

If you have time to do only one thing—like send a hotline message—remember that every voice makes a difference. Thank you in advance for raising yours!

This article was modified for print and for a statewide audience. The original version will appear in the November 2019 issue of AgeWise King County, a monthly e-zine published by the Seattle-King County Advisory Council on Aging & Disability Services.



Contributor Ava Frisinger chairs the Seattle-King County Advisory Council on Aging & Disability Services, which publishes AgeWise King County. She welcomes input from readers via e-mail (advisorychair@agewisekingcounty.org) as well as applicants for open positions on the council. For more information, visit www.agingkingcounty.org/advisory-council.

Free Download



<https://bit.ly/2BwSRQY>

This legislative hotline graphic was created by Aging and Disability Services—the Area Agency on Aging for Seattle & King County—for use by Aging Network advocates throughout Washington state. To use in messages to your advocacy network, open the link, right-click on the image, and select “Save image as” *Format: jpg | 640 px x 247 px | 160 kb*