

Hot Tips

For Legislative Advocates on Developmental Disabilities



TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A
DIFFERENCE

“Get involved as if your life depended on it... Because it does.” –Justin Dart

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Change is made by those who Show Up!

Your elected officials represent you, but they can't do this effectively if they don't know what you want.



This booklet offers examples of ways to become a trusted resource for legislators and other elected officials on issues that affect your life.

These are tried and true methods for successful advocacy. Take that first step to write a letter or email, make a phone call, and attend a reception or an Advocacy Day.

You have
the right
NOT to
remain
silent!

It's about building a relationship with those who make decisions that affect your life. Lawmakers look to their constituents for reliable information on issues before them.



With so many issues to learn about – including education, health care, transportation, the economy – your knowledge of developmental disabilities helps them to do their job!

Be a Resource

There's a fine line between keeping your legislators current on developing issues and over-working your relationship with too much repetition.

If you keep in regular contact with your legislators, be sure to ALWAYS provide fresh, useful information, such as the status of a bill or budget item on which you need their support or assistance.

Legislation changes often and quickly throughout the session, as other interest groups weigh in and amendments are made. Be sure to stay on top of these changes and ...

TAKE ACTION!!!

- ✓ Attend Advocacy Day
- ✓ Join or create a local advocacy group such as a parent coalition or self-advocacy organization
- ✓ Visit The Arc of Alabama's Online Action Center: **www.thearc.org** and their Facebook page - search for **The Arc of Alabama**



We're Here to Help YOU!



Impacting government may feel overwhelming no matter how long you've been advocating, but others are available to guide you along the way.

From parent coalition and self-advocacy organizations to state and local chapters of The Arc, we're here to help you have a voice. It only takes a few simple steps to get into the action:

Be Informed. Check The Arc of Alabama's online Legislation Action Center and Facebook page for legislative updates. Or visit www.legislature.state.al.us
You can even listen to Live Audio at this website!!

Get connected. Join a chapter of The Arc, a parent coalition, self-advocacy or other group that holds the same interests, goals and values you do. Call The Arc of Alabama for resources in your area!

Take ACTION. Visit The Arc of Alabama's Online Action Center, attend town hall meetings and legislative receptions, participate in Advocacy Day, make phone calls, write emails and visit you legislators in person. *(ACTION Tips are provided throughout this booklet!)*

**YOUR
VOICE
OUR
FUTURE**

Do's and Don'ts

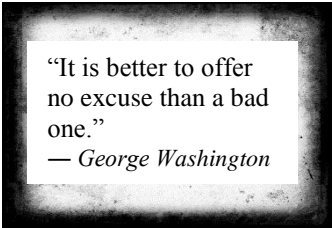
Tips for Meeting with Elected Officials

| Do | Don't |
|---|--|
| ... make appointments. | ... get upset if your legislator can't see you personally. |
| ... be on time for your scheduled visit. | ... be late for the visit. |
| ... be positive and friendly. | ... be confrontational or threatening. Remember, DON'T burn bridges, YOU NEED them more than they need you!! |
| ... clearly state the reason for your visit. | ... try to discuss too many different issues. |
| ... personalize the issue in your life. | ... ignore the secretaries or legislative assistant (LA) . |
| ... provide reliable information. | ... talk only in acronyms. |
| ... give the names of people who can be a resource for additional information. | ... give incorrect information. |
| ... get back to them with more information; be sure to get back to them. | ... try to answer questions with guesses. |
| ... write a "Thank You". | ... forget to write a "Thank You" letter. |
| ... express your appreciation for the Legislative Assistant! They are the door to legislators and committee members. They schedule appointments, answer telephone inquiries, prioritizes mail, sets up Committee meetings and so much more! | ... ignore legislators the rest of the year! |

What you Don't Know Won't (necessarily) Hurt You

Sometimes, a legislator or aide may ask for information that you do not have (such as data or charts). Not only is it okay to say you don't know, it is the very best response you can give!

As a constituent, it's not your job to understand or have access to information that agencies and professional advocates have.

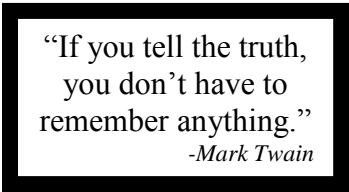


"It is better to offer
no excuse than a bad
one."

— *George Washington*

Stick to what you know best --- your life! You are the expert in telling YOUR story and how it relates to decisions being made by lawmakers.

Instead of guessing, say you don't know; or find someone who does, such as an advocate from an organization that works on behalf of people with disabilities.



"If you tell the truth,
you don't have to
remember anything."

— *Mark Twain*

You will greatly increase your credibility and strengthen your legislative relationships by sticking with what you know!

**"Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters
cannot be trusted with important matters"**

— *Albert Einstein*

MAKE THAT CALL!!

Calling the House or Senate's main phone number is a fast way for you to voice your opinions on bills during the legislative session.

When you call the House or Senate number, an operator will answer and take your message and your message will be sent to all of your legislators. When you call the Governor's number, you will talk to someone in Constituent Affairs and they will take your message.

When you make a call, be sure to follow these simple guidelines:

- ✓ State your **NAME and ADDRESS**.
- ✓ If you know the names of your legislators, or district, that's even better – **state the name and district of your legislator**.
- ✓ Identify the **BILL NUMBER** (or budget item) you're calling about.
- ✓ State **YOUR POSITION** simply. Do you support, oppose, or want changes to the bill?

House
334.242.7600

Senate
334.242.7800

Gov. Bentley
334.242.7100

If the line is busy, KEEP TRYING!



Emails

Your phone calls and emails are important; ALWAYS feel your voice is heard! Multiple people calling about the same issue can have GREAT IMPACT! Most legislators use email to communicate with their constituents and work on their laptops during committee meetings or on the chamber floor.

Alabama Legislature

Go to www.legislature.state.al.us to get direct email addresses for your representative by selecting the following tabs:

- House, *then* Representatives
- Senate, *then* Senators

Or use this formula for all legislators' email address:

House - firstname.lastname@alhouse.gov

Senate - firstname.lastname@alsenate.gov

Example: Thomas.Jefferson@alhouse.gov for house

Or Thomas.Jefferson@alsenate.gov for senate

US Congress

Sometimes, advocates need to voice their concerns to their representatives on a national level. Examples are rights issues that affect everyone, advocacy for services, or cuts to needed benefits like SSI or SSDI. Alabama has two Senators (Shelby and Sessions) and seven representatives (Byrne, Roby, Rogers, Aderholt, Brooks, Palmer, Sewell)

- For Senate contact information, go to www.senate.gov
- For House of Representatives contact information, go to www.house.gov

Mail

Although email is the best way to communicate during the session, when things are happening really fast, a written letter or note can leave a lasting impression. **Thank You cards** remind legislators that you appreciate what they do! (And don't forget you can write letters, send a Thank You or holiday card all during the year!!)

Letters or notes with pictures and personal stories also let your Legislators know **YOU OR YOUR FAMILY MEMBER MATTER!!**

Most importantly, include the same information you would cover in a phone call (see page 8) and limit your letter to one page if possible.

When the Legislature is not in session, writing a letter or email is a good way for you to share your perspectives about issues in greater depth. You can send Letters to:

House

Alabama State House
11 South Union Street
Montgomery, AL 36130

Senate

Alabama State House
11 South Union Street
Montgomery, AL 36130

Gov. Robert Bentley

State Capitol
600 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36130

(You can also visit www.legislature.state.al.us to find your legislator's preferred mailing address!)

Online Information/Action Center

Opportunities to advocate from your home computer are just one click away when you visit The Arc of Alabama's Policy Partner online **Legislative Action Center** at www.thearcofal.org. The Action Center provides:

- ☀ **Action Alerts** provide messages to your legislators that you can use as is or edit using your own words.
- ☀ Easily send a letter to your state Senator and Representatives, to your Congressional representatives, to the Governor and to other elected officials.
- ☀ Send Letters to your local newspaper Editor to make your issue public and to help educate others. Legislators regularly read this section to find out what their constituents are thinking.
- ☀ **Budget side-by-sides** show the contrast between the Governor's budget proposal, House and Senate proposals, and then the final budget.
- ☀ **Bills of interest** provide a brief summary and links to legislative bill reports and budget overviews.
- ☀ Annual **Legislative Fact Sheet for Advocates** contains one-page information sheets on current issues.

Questions? Email info@thearcofal.org

Advocacy Day

Advocacy Day is a great way to learn about the legislative process. Each Advocacy Day begins with an hour briefing at 10:00 in the morning. The briefing includes:

- **Special speakers (as available)**
- **Tips for a successful day**
- **Inside information on current bills and budget issues**

Participants are offered several ways in which to advocate during the afternoon, such as:

- **Meeting with legislators or their aides***
- **Attending hearings or floor sessions**
- **Writing and delivering messages to legislators**

Advocacy Days must be scheduled in advance as several Advocacy groups will be participating!! Call 1.866.243.9557 to schedule your group's participation! (See calendar on following page)

*Appointments with legislators must be made well in advance. Please contact The Arc of Alabama at **1.866.243.9557** if you need help making your appointments.



Message at the State House




When you speak up for yourself, or for others, **YOU are an Advocate!** Your time with legislators, staff or aides is short, and your message should be too. Remember this is a very busy time for them. It is a good idea to plan one minute, five minute, and ten-minute versions of what you want to share with them.

Assume that the person you are talking to does not know anything about you, your life, or the issues that affect your life. To be a good advocate, get your point across with a clear message. Shape your message with three main points:

**YOUR LIFE HAS
PURPOSE.
YOUR STORY IS
IMPORTANT.
YOUR DREAMS
COUNT.
YOUR VOICE
MATTERS.
YOU WERE BORN
TO MAKE AN
IMPACT!!**

1. The issue most important to you.
2. How this issue affects your life or the lives of others.
3. The action or results you are seeking.

Be sure your message answers these questions:

-  Who are you and where do you live?
-  What is important to you and why?
-  What action do you want taken?

Other Tips:

- It never hurts to take a little something to leave behind so they will remember you!!
- Wear a nametag.
- Praise them when they deserve it and *respectfully* express disapproval when they do not.

2017 Advocacy Day Schedule

| | |
|----------|--|
| March 8 | First Day of Session |
| March 15 | 1 st Advocacy Wednesday |
| March 22 | (Legislators Spring Break) |
| March 29 | (Legislators Spring Break) |
| April 5 | 2 nd Advocacy Wednesday |
| April 12 | 3 rd Advocacy Wednesday |
| April 19 | 4 th Advocacy Wednesday |
| April 26 | 5 th Advocacy Wednesday |
| May 3 | 6 th Advocacy Wednesday |
| May 10 | 7 TH Advocacy Wednesday |
| May 17 | 8 th Advocacy Wednesday |
| May 23 | Last Day of Regular Session |
| | <i>The schedule is subject to change!</i> |
| | <i>Check the Legislative Action Center!!</i> |

Information on legislative issues affecting individuals with developmental disabilities and their families will be provided to all participants to share with their legislators. Meetings are held close to the Capitol and Statehouse at The Arc of Alabama, 557 S. Lawrence Street, Montgomery, AL 36104.

If this is your first Advocacy Day and you need a guide and/or help planning your day, please let us know in advance.

Limited travel stipends may be available on a first come, first served basis.

Advocacy Rallies in Montgomery

Some issues that are important to people with developmental disabilities are also important to other groups of advocates. The more voices speaking out on an issue, the more legislators pay attention to it. Whether you are a self-advocate wanting independence, a parent seeking services in your community, a provider who needs better wages or someone with other concerns, join with many other voices on a rally day. We need your voice to join with others!

Some rallies are organized in local communities and some organizations collaborate with others with similar concerns. Some organizations also choose other types of legislative advocacy opportunities that encourage advocacy statewide.

2017 Advocacy Day Rallies

February 28 – 9:30 to 3:00

Arise Citizens' Policy Project

March 7

Autism Society of Alabama

Other Rally or other legislative advocacy activity dates may not have been available at the time of this booklet's publication. Please check The Arc of Alabama's Legislative Action Center or calendar for updates at www.thearcofal.org or call 1.866.243.9557!!



The Bill Process

Alabama has two chambers whose main work is passing laws. Each session, 800 – 1300 bills are introduced JUST in the House; only 20-25% local bills ever make it into law. Only 10% of all other House bills make it into law. To make sure each proposed law is a good idea, bills go through a TOUGH review process.

The two chambers are:

- The **Senate** has 35 members (senators) from the 35 Senate districts. The presiding officer is the Lieutenant Governor. A President Pro Tempore (or Tem for short!) is elected to serve in the Lieutenant Governor's absence.
- The **House of Representatives** has 105 members (representatives) from the 105 House districts. The presiding officer is the Speaker of the House and a Speaker Pro Tem is also elected to preside in the Speaker's absence.

All bills are presented by either or both chambers for a **first reading**. The bill is then referred to a committee that is most appropriate to hear the bill. The committee will hear a bill in a public hearing if the committee receives a written request. There are many different committees. There is also a series of cut-off dates for bills to make it out of each committee or the bill dies. The assigned committee hears the bill and if the committee passes the bill, it is "reported out" to the full chamber in a **second reading** and placed on the General Calendar for the next meeting day.

On the next meeting day, the bill becomes eligible for its third reading and debate. Because there are so many bills, most are not considered very quickly. The Rules Committee places high-priority bills on the Special Order Calendar.

The bill that is considered gets its **third reading** (by number only unless a member requests a full reading, usually as a delaying tactic) when its number comes up in the assigned sequence on the Special Order or General Calendar. Debate in the full chamber begins at this time. When debate ends, the members vote on the bill.

If the bill passes one chamber, it goes to the other chamber and the process repeats.

Once a bill passes both chambers, it goes to the Governor to be signed (approved) or vetoed (rejected).

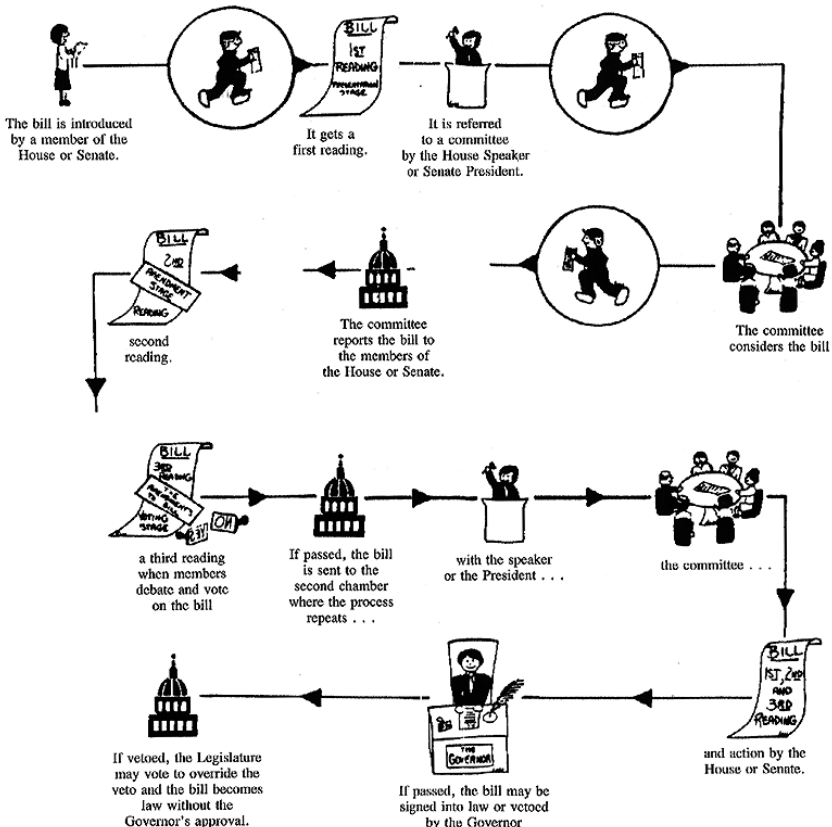
If vetoed, it is sent back to the Legislature, where a simple majority vote can override (reverse) the veto.

If the Governor signs the bill or the Legislature overrides a veto, the bill becomes an act, or law.

Bills change throughout the process based on what legislators hear from those who speak up. Make sure YOUR voice is heard!



A BILL BECOMES LAW



Committees, Debates and the Governor!

Once a Bill is assigned to a Committee, the Committee ***must*** ‘pass’ the bill for it to move forward.

- Know the legislators that serve on the Committee your Bill is assigned to, contact them and ask them to support, reject or amend (change) the bill – especially if your legislator serves on the committee!
- Don’t forget to check the calendar for when the bill is going to be presented
- Ask others to contact committee members.
- Find out about and attend public hearings.
- Testify for or against the bill.

When the bill is debated on the floor:

- Ask your legislators to support, reject or amend it.
- Ask family and friends to contact their legislators and request that they support, reject or amend the bill.
- Write letters to the newspaper about the bill





DON’T FORGET!!! THE BILL MUST PASS BOTH CHAMBERS BEFORE GOING TO THE GOVERNOR SO LEGISLATORS NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU DURING THE PROCESS!!!

On to the Governor!

- Call or write, urging the Governor to sign or veto.
- Ask family and friends to contact the Governor.

Operating Budget Steps

Almost every year there is a need to advocate for needed funding to provide services that offer various support options that meet the many different needs of people with developmental disabilities and their families. The state budget process takes place each year.

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |
| Summer | Fall | Winter | Spring |
| In the Summer, the Governor has all state agencies create Budget Packages (BPs). They must provide a defined percent of cuts and can include requests for increases. | In the Fall, State agencies give their Budget Packages (BPs) to the Governor and his Finance Director so he will have a basis from which to create his budget proposal. He must also adjust for State revenue forecasts. | Continuing in the Fall and on into the Winter, the Governor decides how he wants to spend or save money, based on State agency BPs. He then sends his recommendations to the Legislature for them to work on during the legislative session. | Through the Spring, the Legislature debates how to respond to the governor's budget proposal and must agree before it can pass and go to the Governor for his signature. |



Know BEFORE you VOTE!

Be informed about candidates running for office before voting for them. Below are some helpful questions:

- 1.) Do you have a disability advisor and/or advisory committee?
- 2.) What are your plans for Medicare, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and SSDI reform?
- 3.) People with Disabilities are far more likely to suffer from police violence as their actions/reactions can be misunderstood by law enforcement and others. Police must be trained in how to respond to individuals with disabilities. Do you have a plan to address these issues?
- 4.) The national average rent for a modestly priced one-bedroom apartment is greater than the entire SSI payment of a person with a disability. What would your administration do to address the lack of safe, accessible and affordable housing for people with disabilities and their families?
- 5.) Do you have a plan to address the lack of transportation options for people with disabilities who do not drive or cannot afford private transportation?
- 6.) People with serious medical conditions are seeking safe, legal access to medical cannabis. Do you support legalizing medical cannabis for people with certain disabilities that would benefit from this?
- 7.) The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is significantly higher than the unemployment rate for the general population. Do you have specific initiatives focusing on employment of people with disabilities?
- 8.) Do you have a plan to appoint/employ people with disabilities in your cabinet or other high-ranking offices?
- 9.) Over 85% of people with disabilities and seniors in a recent survey indicated they preferred to live in their own homes. What is your position on home and community based long-term services and supports?

Know YOUR Candidate!

Learn how they voted on past issues,
Know their positions on certain issues,
Read past speeches and even see who funds them

By visiting websites like

www.votesmart.org

Stay Informed about the needs of those YOU advocate for!

Sign up for updates, news articles of interest and
Legislative Action Alerts by visiting

www.thearcofal.org

and joining our email list. You can also receive
updates from The Arc of the US on federal policy
developments by visiting

www.thearc.org

Parent Coalitions

Parent Coalitions are organizations designed to provide information and resources to families who have sons/daughters or other family members with developmental disabilities. If you don't have one in your area, consider starting one. Local chapters of The Arc and other disability services and advocacy groups would be glad to help!! Some other groups are Bringing Up Downs Syndrome (BUDS), Down Syndrome Alabama, Autism Society of Alabama. Some of these groups also have a Governmental Affairs Committee or Public Policy Committee and are always looking for members!

Self-Advocacy

Self-Advocacy organizations for individuals with developmental disabilities exist in communities throughout the state. These groups are led by self-advocates and, through their own self-determination, speak up for positive change that have direct impact on their lives. Some examples are rights, employment, housing, services, and learning opportunities.

People First of Alabama
1929 Canyon Road
Vestavia Hills, AL 35216
205-422-5006
pf.susan.200@gmail.com

Using Technology to Advocate

Many legislators use technology to reach their constituents, share their views on issues, and quickly work to inform and educate each other.

Facebook pages are a way to share quick thoughts and ideas. Find your legislator on Facebook!! Did you know Governor Bentley has his own Facebook page?

The Arc of Alabama has a Facebook page with updates on legislative news, a forum for discussions and links to other advocacy groups. (www.facebook.com, search for The Arc of Alabama.)

10 Tips for Voters With Disabilities

1 Learn more about voting

Call, visit, or email your State or local elections office well in advance of election day. Links to State election offices are available at http://www.eac.gov/voter_resources/contact_your_state.aspx

Familiarize yourself with:

- The voting laws in your State.
- Voter registration deadlines.
- The ballot.
- The accessible voting machine.
- Alternative voting options.
- Accessibility of the polling place.
- The candidates.
- Ballot propositions.

2 Register to vote

Your local elections office can help you register and answer any questions you may have. After you register, double-check the accuracy of your registration. Links to State election offices and online voter registration are available at http://www.eac.gov/voter_resources/contact_your_state.aspx

3 Choose the right voting method for you

There are several voting options available:

- You can vote at your designated local polling place on election day.
- Many states offer early voting or absentee voting.

4 Communicate your needs in advance

Identifying your needs may help you and your elections office. Consider contacting your local elections office about voting options for voters with disabilities. The election office can provide information about accessible machines and other voting methods. On election day, alert poll workers about your accessibility needs.

5 Check the location and accessibility of your polling place

Your State or local elections office can tell you the location of your polling place. It will also have information about polling place accessibility. Inquire about the location's accessible voting equipment.

6 Know your rights

Under The Help America Vote Act, you have the right to vote privately and independently. The Americans with Disabilities Act has been interpreted as setting the tone for polling place and ballot access in certain situations. Consider reaching out to organizations that support voters with disabilities.

7 Follow up with your elections office after you vote

Election officials want to hear about your experience with accessible voting. After Election Day, tell your elections office about your experience voting, whether it was positive or in need of improvement. Many elections offices have committees for voters with disabilities. Consider getting involved.

8 Know who can help you if voting is not accessible

Contact your State or local elections office with your specific concerns. You can also contact the Department of Justice Voting Rights Division at <http://www.justice.gov/crt/Complaint/votintake/index.php>

Also, consider speaking with organizations that support people with disabilities.

9 Stay informed

After you vote, sign up for e-mail and text alerts to stay connected with your local elections office. Consider getting involved directly. Join a community engagement committee for voters with disabilities or offer your assistance as a poll worker.

10 Get more information

Your local elections office might be able to connect you with

ALPHABET SOUP

Amendment: Bills are often changed through amendments. Sometimes the changes are minor, but sometimes they are drastic enough they entirely alter the intent of the legislation.

Dropped: When a bill is introduced, it is submitted to a clerk who assigns the bill a number.

Floor: The full chamber of either the House or Senate. It is where legislators vote as a whole.

Hearing: A committee “hears” public testimony from citizens, agencies and professional lobbyists who explain why a bill is good, bad or in need of amendments.

Reported Out: When a committee passes a bill and the bill is sent to the full chamber.

Signed: The bill is approved.

Vetoed: The bill is rejected.

Override: The bill was sent back to the Legislature and a simple majority vote reversed the veto.

Pull: Can refer to pulling a legislator off the floor or it can refer to an action in the Rules Committee in which a member is allowed to pull a bill to the floor for a vote.

Special Session: The Governor may call a special session to consider specific subjects. Only the subject matter will be reviewed unless approved by a two-thirds vote in both houses. A special session may last up to 12 days within a 30-day calendar span.

Sine Die: (Without Day) The final adjournment of a legislative session, without adjourning to a specific time or date.

Advocacy Survival Kit

RUBBER BAND

Be flexible. Advocacy takes many twists and turns. People who are flexible will have longevity and success.

ERASER

It is okay to make mistakes – in fact, you can count on making them! Do not let missteps keep you from moving forward.

CHEWING GUM

Stick to what you believe in. Do not give up! Real change takes time and tenacity.

MIRROR

Change begins with YOU.

PENNY

A penny for your thoughts. Tell your story!

HEART

Speak up about things that touch your heart, things that are important to you.

LIFESAVER

Take a friend. There is no need to go it alone!

REMEMBER THIS....

(Use this space to help you remember! Write down bill numbers you are advocating for and the names of your legislators.)



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www.thearcofal.org



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