

Do it Yourself: A People's Guide to Legislative Action 2009

This series is designed to help you understand the legislative budget process and take action. We have tried to answer the most popular questions and get you ready to raise your voice about state policy! This guide is only intended to get you started. Come up with your own ideas and adapt the ones we have provided to make them work for you. Share this information with family, neighbors and friends. If we raise all our voices together, we CAN make a difference! This guide focuses on the budget process, but can be adapted to other legislation, too.

If you have questions along the way, please contact us (our numbers are listed in the letterhead above). Use the pieces in this series separately or all at once.

The most important thing is that you act.

In this series you will find information on:

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Calling Your Legislator

When should I call a legislator?

Calls are usually made to legislators close to voting time on important legislation, but they can be made at any point in the process. It is best to call during office hours (generally 9 am – 5 pm). You might also call after sending a letter to be sure the legislator got your message.

Who should I call?

You should call your elected Representative and/or Senator as well as legislators that have particular influence. For example, when calling about budget cuts in the Senate, you should call your legislator and Senator Harris.

If you are in Cleveland, we have local number that will connect you with any legislator's office (including Governor Strickland) – just ask to be connected. That number is **216.787.3000**.

There is also a number that can give you any legislators Columbus office number and their home office number. That number is **800.282.0253** (this number can not connect you to an office, it can only give the appropriate number to call).

What should I say?

Be prepared with a very short message – one you might leave on an answering machine. Ask to speak with the legislator and if they are not available, ask to speak with the Aide that handles the budget. Be sure to leave your name and address. Then state your message.

An example might be:

"My name is _____ and I live at _____. I am calling Senator _____ to ask him/her to oppose cuts to health, human services and education in the state budget. I am asking the Senator to support the continued funding of <insert name of programs that are important to you.> I am asking Senator _____ to support fair, equitable and progressive tax reform that supports vital services for all Ohioans."

General Tip:

If you get voicemail, leave a message. Be sure to speak slowly and clearly.

Or "My name is _____ and I live at _____. I am calling Senator _____ to ask him/her to protect funding for vital health, human service and education for all Ohioans. I rely on Medicaid for health coverage to keep my family safe and keep my job. I am asking Senator _____ to oppose the Governors proposed cuts to vital services. Specifically, I feel <insert name of programs that are important to you> should receive continued funding. Please support a budget that is good for all Ohioans."

Or "My name is _____ and I live at _____. Vital health, human services, and education programs make Ohio stronger. I want to tell Senator _____ that I support equitable taxes that raise enough revenue to invest in Ohio and protect the programs that keep parents healthy and working, keep children and older adults safe and in the community, and support the well-being of our state's most vulnerable citizen."

Feeling Nervous?

When visiting or calling a legislator, many of us feel nervous the first time (and sometimes the second or third time). Relax. Many times you will know more about an issue than your representative. You have lived it and experienced it. Be honest. If you are more comfortable speaking from notes, then do so. Remember, these are our representatives and they need us.

A Guide for Writing Letters to Your Legislators

(Information in this section adapted from materials by the Campaign to Protect Ohio's Future)

Writing to your legislators is one of the most effective and powerful ways to share your message. It may require a little time and effort on your part, but it can make an important difference. Legislators often say that 6-10 letters from their constituents on any issue will make them take notice. In fact most state legislative offices report getting very few personal letters from constituents – making them all the more important and effective. So take 10 minutes and write your personal letter today.

What do I need to know to write to a legislator?

- Keep your letter to one page or less.
- A handwritten letter is fine as long as it is clear and easy to read.
- Focus on one topic in your letter – simple is better than complex.
- Tell why the issue is important to you (ex: “Keeping Medicaid Parent Coverage eligibility is important because it provides health care that allows me to work.”)
- If you need ideas, look at the sample letter in this guide, but your own words are best!
- Don't forget to include a return address.
- You can mail, fax or e-mail your letter. We suggest you do all three if you can.
- You can send your letter to more than one person! Consider sending your letter to your elected Representative and Senator and then to other important decision makers like:
 - Senator Harris, President of the Senate
 - Representative Budish, Speaker of the House
 - Representative Sykes, Chair of the House Finance Committee
 - Representative Brown, Chair of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee
 - Senator Carey, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee
 - Governor Ted Strickland

General Tip:

Your story is the most important part of the letter. It carries your message about the cuts.

What points should I include?

- Ohio should adopt a fair, progressive, and diversified system of taxation that eliminates our structural deficit and provides stable revenue sufficient to fund government services and invest in Ohio's future
- Health, human services and education are important to Ohio and important to Ohioans.
- Your story!

Don't forget this:

- Your legislators want to know what you think about these issues.
- Your opinion is important.
- **You CAN make a difference.**

Sample Letter

(This is just a sample, your own words are best! Examples taken from actual letters. Please use your own story.)

February 12, 2009

The Honorable Senator Harris
State House
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Senator Harris,

I am writing to you as a citizen of Ohio, a voter, and a member of the Advocates for Budget Legislation Equality (ABLE) Coalition to urge you to fully fund vital health and human services. I feel this is an important priority for Ohio and I support tax reforms that invest in our communities and vital programs.

[YOUR STORY HERE]I have two children who are in preschool and elementary school who will be affected by any cuts to education and preschool. Early childhood development is where it all begins and unfortunately the state government does not seem to understand this. There are so many cuts now to education that schools all over Ohio are going to close. More money to the schools needs to be allocated NOT cut out.

My mom just turned 65 and would be affected by any budget cuts to Medicaid and Senior Services. The seniors are not adequately taken care of as it is, and to take additional funding is unacceptable. My mother relies on home delivered meals and transportation provided by Merrick House Senior Center. If they are not adequately funded, they will have to cut services. And my mother will be hungry and stranded. Our local government needs to work for us – the people of Ohio.

This year, the Governor intends to remove earmarks that will affect poor and low-income families as well as all of our publicly educated children. If the budget passes, it will:

- Family and Children First might lose \$1,000,000 in funding.
- Child and Family Health Services might lose \$6,310,000.
- \$2,091,299 from the Maternal Childcare Block Grant.
- STEM Initiatives could lose up to \$10,285,000.
- The Help Me Grow program faces \$24,965,244 in potential losses.

These are just a few of the negative repercussions that concern me about the earmark removals proposed in the Governor's budget and I hope you will join me in opposing it.

Second, I believe in and support tax reform—it is important for Ohio to adopt a fair, progressive, and diversified system of taxation that provides stable revenue to fund government services and invest in Ohio's Future. The current tax plan proposed in the executive budget fails to do this. It isn't fair, it doesn't eliminate the structural deficit, it doesn't provide sufficient and stable revenue, and it isn't balanced. Don't cut services to give tax breaks.

Please vote to save services and ensure a better future of all Ohioans.

Sincerely,
Jane Q. Constituent
*1000 Every Street
Any City, Ohio 00000*

Raising the community voice at the policy level...

ABLE Do It Yourself Series * 3500 Lorain Ave. #501A Cleveland, OH 44113 * Contact 216.651.2606 info@organizeohio.org

Scheduling Legislative Visits

(Adapted from materials provided by the Ohio Empowerment Coalition <http://www.overtherhine.org/contactcenter/projects.html>)

When you schedule a legislative visit, you are going to a face-to-face meeting with the legislator at their office. These visits can be scheduled for the legislator's office in Columbus or in their home district (an example would be meeting with Mike Skindell in his Cleveland office). Representatives and Senators are in their home district Monday and Friday and in Columbus Tuesday thru Thursday.

Why would I schedule a legislative visit?

A legislative visit gives you an opportunity to talk face-to-face with the legislator. You can really put a face to the issue and ask for a response on the spot. This is one of the few ways to actually start a real conversation where you ask questions and get answers.

Who can schedule legislative visits?

Anyone can schedule legislative visits. You can do it representing a larger group (like ABLE) or as an individual citizen. You can schedule the visit for just yourself or for a larger group. Be sure to have an idea of how many people will be with you when you call.

Who do I call and what do I say?

- To schedule the visit, call the office of the legislator you would like to meet with. You can get their number by calling 800.282.0253.
- In Representatives' offices, you will most likely speak with the Rep's. Legislative Aide. In Senate offices, you might speak with a scheduler or the Legislative Aide. You should call at least a week before you would like to have the meeting (earlier is better). Simply state that you would like to meet with Senator_____ and let them know the topic.
- Have your calendar on hand, because the day you were hoping for might already be booked. Be sure to ask how much time you will have with the legislator so you can be prepared. If going to Columbus to meet, you might schedule the meeting with your elected official and other key decision makers.
- Also ask where their office is located. If you are meeting with a larger group, the meeting might need to take place in a conference room – be sure to get the details.

Some legislators are more likely to meet with their own constituents. If they hold a leadership position, be sure to remind them that their position impacts all the citizens in Ohio and you have as much of a right to their time as anyone.

You may want to schedule a meeting with a legislator before a certain date (like the date of an important vote). If you can't get on the schedule with the legislator, you should ask to make an appointment with their Legislative Aide.

So I scheduled the meeting, now what?

Prepare written materials about the topic you are discussing. If you are meeting with a Senator about the budget, you might bring ABLE's position paper on revenue (see appendix) or a collection of stories from those who will be impacted by the cuts (you can also get these from ABLE). Get a map and make sure you know where you are going.

What should I expect at the meeting?

1. Upon entering, tell the receptionist who you are and whom you want to see.
2. Be patient, it is not uncommon for your legislators and aides to be late because of the hearings, committee meetings and voting sessions.

General Tips:

Do:

Be affirming
Be appreciative
Be courteous
Be brief, be responsive
Be clear and concise
Ask questions

Don't:

Don't make personal attacks or be rude or sarcastic
Don't be defensive
Don't bring up other issues
Don't take personal offense to interruptions
Don't have a group discussion among your group during your visit
Don't give up hope if legislator is not responsive

The Visit

1. Your delegation coordinator should introduce the group and state the purpose of the visit. Be prepared, there is a chance you may be cut short, so make your point at the start:

Example:

Good afternoon Representative (name)/Senator (name) or Legislative Aide (name), my name is and we are here on behalf of ABLE and the Campaign to Protect Ohio's Future. We're here to ask Representative (name)/Senator (name) to not make any further cuts to health and human services or education, and to ensure that the state has sufficient revenue to protect these vital services.

2. Each person should introduce themselves by name, where they live, and what they do.
3. At least one member of your delegation should share a personal experience or situation that illustrates your point. Any connection you can make to the legislator's district is very useful. Remember, the legislator has been elected to represent the best interest of their constituents.

Example: **I volunteer at an emergency soup kitchen at my church and I know how important our program is to senior citizens who can't afford to buy food and other necessities.**

4. It is important to be clear and focus on the decision you want your legislator to make.
5. Remember that you are not expected to be an expert. If you don't know that answer to the question, write it down and let the legislator know that you or a representative from the coalition will get back to him or her with the answer.

"Close the deal!" For example:

Ask the legislator for their commitment and agreement to:

- **SUPPORT increased revenues in order to ensure adequate funding for such services as Head Start, Medicaid, food banks, adult protective services and child care. We urge you to stop the health and human service and education funding cuts.**

6. The delegation coordinator should close by reiterating your point, stating any follow-up you have committed to do and leave your materials.
7. **Close by thanking the legislator or legislative aide for their time and attention. Don't forget to send a thank you letter highlighting key points from the meeting!**

Writing a Letter to the Editor

What is a Letter to the Editor?

A letter to the Editor seems self-explanatory, but a little background may help to understand the process and purpose. Letters to the Editor are a way for an individual to make his or her views known to the newspaper, the general public, and to the leaders of a community. Most community leaders and elected officials read the letters to the Editor in their local paper on a regular basis to better understand public responses to community events. Letters to the Editor have been, and continue to be, powerful tools for positive change. Editors receive high volumes letters every day, and so must make decisions about which ones to print. The following is a brief guide to increase your chances of getting a letter published.

The Basics

Many, if not most, letters to the Editor are ignored because they do not meet the submission criteria (or the rules) of the newspaper. Most newspapers publish their guidelines in every issue. For example, The Plain Dealer includes an inserted box on the Opinion Page in the Metro section that clearly describes how they wish to receive letters.

Most papers require that the name, address, and contact information of the letter writer be included with the letter, and will not publish a letter that does not contain this information. **Papers will not publish your personal information**; the newspaper requests the information in order to verify your identity and to contact you if they wish to edit your letter. In the past, papers included the address of the writer along with their name and letter, but this no longer happens.

All papers have word count limits, due to limited space. They will print letters that exceed the limit only in rare instances: if the letter writer is a known public figure, if the information in the letter comes from an expert on a particular issue and that information is considered newsworthy or of benefit to the community, or if the letter has some other unusual appeal. However, most letters that go over the word count are automatically dismissed.

Most papers will publish only letters that pertain to a recent public issue or article. Some papers will be more specific saying, "We will only publish responses to Op-Eds that appeared in the last seven days."

No paper will publish any letter that contains profanity or that openly threatens another person or institution.

To be sure that you are meeting the submission guidelines of the paper to which you are sending a letter, gather as much information as you can about their requirements before sending your letter. Check the information in the paper itself, look on the paper's web site, or call the Editor's desk for clarification.

How do I write a letter to the Editor?

Always address the letter with **To the Editor**:

Write out what you wish to say as a first draft, making sure to include all of the information you want to convey.

Edit the letter for content, eliminating any unnecessary words or information. Check for restatements: have you repeated yourself anywhere? Can you delete certain sentences that recap what you have already written?

Proofread the letter for spelling, grammar, and other errors.

Set the letter aside and reread it at a later time. Does it say what you mean? Is it clear and concise? Have another person (a person whose judgment you trust) read the letter and give you feedback. If you make any changes, be sure to re-edit the work for spelling and grammar.

Remember that there are different styles of letters to the Editor. Some have only one or two sentences, and their value comes from their directness. Some go into lengthier explanations of a point and serve to provide education and differing perspectives. Choose what kind of letter you wish to write.

Finally, pat yourself on the back. You have committed a great act of civic responsibility, even if your letter is not published. Do not despair. Remember that your letter was probably one of at least 50 or 100 (or more, depending on the issue) the Editor received. Remember that the point of writing letters to the Editor is not so much to get printed, but to raise concerns about public issues. Keep trying.

Final Tips

- 1) Meet the paper's submission guidelines.
- 2) Choose a timely topic.
- 3) Keep the letter short and concise.
- 4) Proofread, send, and congratulate yourself on participating in the democratic process

Guide to Giving Testimony

(Adapted from information provided by the Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio www.uhcanohio.org)

What is Testimony?

Public hearings are a way for elected leaders to hear from Ohioans and their constituents (constituents are people who live in the legislator's district) about how their decisions might affect them and their communities. Giving testimony is one of many important ways to make your voice heard on important issues and influence the decision of the legislators. "Giving testimony" means that you are telling your story or sharing the story of how legislative decisions will impact your life, your family, your community and your state.

How does it work?

There is some work to do before giving testimony. First, find out when testimony is being heard on the issue you want to speak about. This can be done a number of ways.

You can:

- Contact the chair of the committee or subcommittee and request a schedule
- Call the legislative hotline number for your issue
- Call your representative or senator
- Check the committee page on-line
- Check with a local, state or national advocacy group

Each committee and subcommittee may have different rules and guidelines for people wishing to testify. **You will always need your testimony in writing.** You must find out what those rules are and follow them carefully in order to be heard. Most committees will require that you schedule your testimony ahead of time and provide your testimony in writing (don't forget a copy for yourself!). You can find out the rules by calling the committee chair. For example, if you would like to testify in front of the health and human services subcommittee of the House finance committee, you would provide 25 copies of written testimony 24 hours before the hearing. You would get to speak for three minutes (most all committees have time limits - generally 3 to 5 minutes, so be prepared!).

You do not need to be present to give testimony. You may decide to submit only written testimony, but your presence will make it more powerful. You can also have someone else read your testimony – family, friend, or agency staff. If you are submitting written testimony only, some of the same guidelines still apply. Be sure to call ahead and get the instructions.

You should also make sure you know where you are going and that you have everything you need (a map, money for parking, lunch, etc). Being prepared will help make it a better experience!

Most people who testify are inexperienced, nervous and uncertain, so you are not alone. Most legislators understand that and show respect and understanding when you speak.

How do I write testimony?

Writing testimony is fairly simple, but there are few tips to keep in mind. The testimony should include the committee name and the chair person, as well as the date and your name at the top of the page. From there, you should write what you plan to say.

Make sure your testimony is:

1. Simple
2. Stays on the topic
3. Tells your story **honestly** and clearly. Don't make it "better" than it really is.
4. If you are there representing a larger group, be sure to say so and tell how many people you represent (example: "I am here on behalf of the Sunny Side Day Care mothers which represents 50 parents from the Miami Valley").
5. Addresses why you need the service/program, what hardship you (and your family or those you represent) would face without it, and how you came to need the service (lost job, accident, children, etc).
6. Make sure you let them know what you want them to do. **(Example: "I am asking you to restore Medicaid eligibility" OR "... increase day care voucher eligibility")**. **This is the most important part of your message – don't leave it out! You should state it at the beginning *and* end of your testimony.**

What happens when I am there?

If you are unsure of exactly where to go, ask the information desk – that is why they are there. Once you reach the testimony room, you will need to check in with the scheduler (if you are unsure of who is creating the schedule, ask another person in the room) and **SIGN IN**. Then you should have a seat and the Committee Chair (or other such person) will call on you when it is your turn.

When you are giving testimony, there are some basic pieces of protocol to follow:

- Always start by addressing the committee chair and committee (for example, say: "Thank you Chairperson ____ and members of the committee for this opportunity...").
- Then tell your story.
- You may take questions at the end, but they rarely ask questions of constituents. If you are asked a question, your answer should be addressed to the committee chair (regardless of who asked the question). This means that first you might say: "Thank you Chairperson ____ and (name of Representative/Senator that asked the question). That is an important question..." If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, say "I don't know the answer to that question at this time, but I will research it and send you a reply in the next day or two."
- Keep it short – testimony is generally limited to 3 minutes. Some days, testimony can be a long process. The committee or other group you are testifying in front of may take breaks and delay your opportunity to speak. **You should be prepared to be at the Statehouse for most or all of the day.** If your elected Representative and Senator are not a part of the committee you are testifying before, you should drop an extra copy of your testimony off at their office before you leave Columbus.

General Tip:

Remember that the legislators work for **you**. They **want** to hear from you and you have the **right** to access their time. Your **story** is an **important** way to get **information** to elected leaders who are making **difficult** decisions that **impact** your **life** and your **community**. Act! Today!

Registering Voters

(Information adapted from Greater Cleveland Voter Registration Coalition www.clevelandvotes.org)

Why register voters?

Voters elect important decision makers. It is voters who choose our State Representatives and State Senators, as well as our Governor and other important leaders. And these important leaders decide how to structure our taxes and how tax dollars are spent. If we work to register voters that believe our leaders should protect health, human services and education and create a fair, progressive and diversified tax system, those voters will elect officials that share those same beliefs.

Okay, how do I register someone to vote?

All you need to register voters are voter registration cards and a black ink pen. You can get voter registration cards that can be used anywhere in the state by calling the Secretary of State's office at [1-877-767-6446](tel:1-877-767-6446). Or you can get cards for your county at your local board of elections office – just check the phone book for the address.

Be sure to carefully follow the instructions on the voter registration card and be sure that all of the spaces are correctly filled out. It is okay to look over someone's card and help them fill it out. Only the person that wants to register can fill out the signature box. The signature must remain totally in the lines provided.

Who can register to vote?

To register to vote, the person:

- Must be a United States Citizen;
- Must be at least 18 years old on the day of the General Election;
- Must be a resident of Ohio for at least 30 days;
- Must register to vote at least 30 days before an election to be eligible to vote in that election.
- 17 year old residents can register and vote in a Primary Election if they will be 18 on or before the General Election. 17-year-olds can vote for candidates only.

Anything else I need to know to register voters?

You should turn in any completed cards right away! A person must be registered to vote at least 30 days before the election they wish to vote in, but citizens can register any time.

Completed cards can be turned in to your local board of elections or mailed to the Secretary of State's office at:

Secretary of State
108 E Broad Street, 15th floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Then get out there and vote.

Remind others to vote.

General Tip:

Common mistakes on voter registration cards:

- ♦ not checking the boxes at the top that confirm a person is a citizen and at least 18,
- ♦ not signing the card or signing outside the lines, and
- ♦ Forgetting the date.

Check the card carefully!

Scheduling an Agency Visit

(Adapted from materials created by the Campaign to Protect Ohio's Future www.protectohio.org)

What is an Agency Visit?

An agency visit is an opportunity for you to invite legislators to your agency. By hosting a visit you are providing a state legislator with an educational experience to personally witness the importance of maintaining funding for the services you work so hard to provide. This is the kind of experience that can't be communicated through lobbying in Columbus. It is our hope that by visiting an agency, the legislator will gain a greater appreciation of the services offered and the critical need for health and human services in Ohio. With that experience and appreciation, we hope the legislator will become a champion for ensuring adequate funding for essential human services in the state budget.

How does it work?

It is best to invite the elected officials that represent the area where the agency is located or where most of the folks that access services reside. You can invite a legislator to visit by sending a formal letter or with a phone call. We recommend both. You can invite more than one legislator for the visit. This is especially effective for agencies that are regional and may serve folks across many districts. The invitation should come from the agency director or a board member. Not only agency staff, but also service consumers can organize these visits! If you use services and want to invite a legislator to visit the agency you, just talk it over with a staff member at the agency and together, go through the process of inviting the legislator to visit!

Once you have secured a commitment from the legislator, you need to be prepared at your agency. Identify spokes people to tell their stories and determine what parts of the agency you would like the legislator to experience. For example, a day care may arrange for the legislators to sit in on a class. A senior center may arrange for the legislators to sit with residents during a meal. The director should also take an active role.

What are the key components of a visit?

- Delivering your message. An example might be "State funding for health, human services and education helps to provide for services like ours. Our daycare keeps children safe, provides education and other opportunities, and keeps parents working. It is important to protect funding for these services and other services that benefit our community. We can only do that with fair and equitable tax reform."
- Providing the real life experience. It is important to provide an opportunity for the legislators to talk with the folks that access the services. This helps them gain an understanding that the services supported by the state are more than line items in the budget – they are vital to real people's lives.
- Getting a commitment. At the end of the visit, make sure the legislator knows what you want them to do. An example might be, "We are asking you to support our work by opposing any cuts to health, human services and education. Can you tell us how you plan to vote on the proposed budget and how you will help protect these vital services?" If the legislator can not commit to protect services, find out what might sway their opinion or what other information they might need.
- Provide information. The legislator should leave your agency with written information about the budget cuts and equitable tax reform (contact ABLE for materials). They should also leave with real stories they can share with colleagues and information about your agency.
- Follow-up. Make a plan to follow-up with all of the legislators that visited your office. The follow-up can be done by phone (if you arrange with the legislator talk by phone) or by mail. The follow-up should restate your message and the commitment from the legislator. If the legislator can not make a commitment to protect services, the follow-up should urge them to reconsider. It should also provide information about any questions or other additional materials that the legislator indicated they would like or might influence their opinion.

Raising the community voice at the policy level...

**SAMPLE LETTER
INVITING YOUR LEGISLATOR TO VISIT AN AGENCY**

[ON AGENCY'S LETTERHEAD]

(Adapt the contents of this sample invitation to the organization as you see necessary)

Date

The Honorable John Doe
Ohio Senate
Statehouse
Columbus, Ohio 43215

OR

The Honorable Jane Doe
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Senator Doe OR Representative Doe:

I am writing to invite you to visit and tour (NAME OF ORGANIZATION). This will be an excellent opportunity for us to acquaint you with the services we provide and how additional cuts in state funding to local government and health and human services will have a direct impact on the children and families we serve.

Reductions in funding and the growing demand for services are making it increasingly difficult to address the needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens – abused and neglected children, working families, people living with disabilities, older adults and people living in poverty. That is why protecting health and human services is important and equitable tax reform is necessary– it provides funds in this state budget to help pay for services these Ohioans depend on.

At this visit, you will have the chance to see our services first hand. As you and your colleagues in the General Assembly prepare the FY2010-2011 state budget, we are very concerned about the \$7 billion hole that has to be filled and what the implications are for vulnerable populations served by organizations like (NAME OF ORGANIZATION).

We would like to take this opportunity to share our ideas with you on how we can work together to improve this situation.

I will follow up with a call to your office next week to learn of your availability. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (PHONE NUMBER). Thank you for your consideration of this invitation.

Sincerely,
(NAME),
(TITLE)

Getting Others Involved

Getting others involved is one of the most important things we can do right now. The more folks that are educated and involved, the stronger we are.

Who can I help get involved?

You can start with people you know. Talk to friends, family and neighbors. If you are involved in your child's day care, talk to other parents and the staff at the facility. You can reach out to local clubs, faith-based organizations (like churches) and service organizations.

At ABLE, we have individuals and organizations that have called or participated in various events and we could use your help to continue to reach out to others who are interested in taking action on the state budget. Contact us for a list!

How do I start?

Identify who you would like to reach out to and figure out what message will work best. Your story and why you are involved is a good place to start. It is also easier to get others involved if you can help them take action (like writing their legislator or making a call). Don't get offended if others don't share your passion. The important part is starting the conversation and educating more people. Some groups may ask you to give a presentation to a small group (like residents in a senior center or day care parents). Here are a couple of guides to help you get started:

Community Presentation

Agenda:

1. Introductions

{go around the room and let everyone talk about who they are and why they came to the meeting, what part of the State budget interests them/for which they are a stakeholder, etc. Be sure to keep this part moving – especially in large groups; it is okay to set time limits if the group is large}

2. What programs and services do you use regularly?

{Prompt them if they are unsure...you can ask about services you think they may use, like transportation, meal programs, childcare vouchers, TANF, etc., depending on who you're meeting with. If group seems stuck, start with general programs like education and fire and safety, then move into more specific ones...Keep track of comments on a flipchart or blackboard.}

3. What does the state budget have to do with keeping those programs alive?

{Here, you just talk about how the state funds the programs you just listed, and whether that money is threatened now. When talking about how state funds programs, break it down into the simplest way possible. Revenue and spending: what goes in comes back out. That leads to the next point...}

4. How can the state come up with money to continue to pay for those programs?

{Talk about how the state gets revenue, and what the problems are with that system.}

- Why taxes are important
- Why we need sustainable revenue and how fair taxes can help

5. What can you do to protect the services you need?

{Offer to help people work on letters together, or write one letter together that everyone can sign. Have folks sign-up for the rally on April 12. Talk about other ways to get the message out – telling their story and writing letters to the editor are some examples.}

- Write letters, make phone calls, talk to your friends, family, and neighbors

Miscellaneous tips:

- Be sure to bring sign-in sheets and sign-up sheets!
- Have a way for folks to get involved right away!! If you are talking about Medicaid eligibility reductions (or other program reductions) bring those eligibility numbers with you (people will want to know how they will be affected).
- It's good to have a chart with those numbers on the wall or someplace so people can easily apply Poverty lines to their own income situations.
- Remind folks that this will impact the whole community – if they are not losing their health care, their neighbor might be...we all need to act.
- Be sure to value personal stories (but balance with information and action). You do not need to be an expert to give these presentations... if you do not know the answer to the question, write it down and tell them you will get back to them (be sure to look up the answer and get back to them).
- Feel free to say at the beginning that you are not an expert but that decisions are being made in Columbus that affect lots of Ohioans and we should all try to inform ourselves. Starting out this way can put everyone on the same page.
- Be familiar with your message and bring the tools you need with you (handouts, sign-up sheets, pens, etc – contact ABLE for up-to-date presentation materials).
- Allow time for questions, but be sure to control this time....or you could be there all night.

Or You can reach out to agencies in your community and help them get involved.

Here are some ideas on how you can get started:

Goal of the Call:

Be sure you know what you want to get out of the call before you make it. The goal may change depending on who you talk to at an agency. Some generic goals for these budget calls might include:

- Educating the agency
- Gaining access to their base to give a presentation
- Securing agency commitment to _____ (fill a bus, send 10 people, put article in newsletter, etc)
- Identifying folks to give testimony or participate in another way
- Attend a community meeting and/or bring community members to a community meeting
- Securing a face-to-face meeting to talk about the budget and how we can mobilize as a community

Who to work with at an agency:

Executive Director:

Advantages	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They often make decisions about allocations of staff time (and other resources) • They will be familiar with how state funding cuts may impact their agency; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sure the information moves beyond the ED to the whole staff and the people that rely on the services. • Unless they can see specific impact to their organization, they may hesitate to take on another issue.

Opportunity: Speak directly on the issue, how it could affect their organization, what is needed, and how you can help (like providing materials, opportunity for action or giving a presentation).

Policy Person:

Advantages	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some agencies have employees focused on policy. They are a useful ally in building a case to support agency involvement • Because the State Budget is a policy issue(s) that affects them, this person likely will, or should, be familiar with the impacts/opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • same challenge as ED

Opportunity: Same as Director

Organizer/Community Leader/Front Line Staff:

Advantages	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These folks understand the human side and the application of state funded programs to real people's lives. • They also have access to constituents – which we want to mobilize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making this issue a priority and helping them to understand how their involvement can make a big difference.

Opportunity: Front line staff are experts in their field. Treat them as such while offering them some of the resources they probably don't have time or capacity to access on their own. Ask them for ideas on how the communities they work with could raise their voices, give them examples of what other communities are doing.

General Tip: Why try to build a relationship with one person at an organization? Personal contacts can give you credibility and help you navigate an unfamiliar agency. They can also carry your message from the inside.

What you should know before you call:

You do not have to be an expert to reach out to others. Make sure you do know where folks can find more information. Be familiar with your message and main talking points:

- The Governor's proposed budget cuts vital services to Ohio's most vulnerable citizens.
- Funding must be restored for health, human services and education.
- These cuts will have a negative impact across our communities (including organizations like the one you're calling).
- These cuts are bad for the future of Ohio.
- Tax reform in Ohio should provide sufficient resources to restore funding for programs necessary to invest in Ohio's future.
- A fair, progressive and diversified system of taxation that provides stable revenue for services is important to Ohio's future.
- We need to work together to ensure the future of Ohio.
- These services are important to all of us. That's why we are working as a part of the larger Campaign to Protect Ohio.

Possible Call Outline

I. Introduction

Who you are, why you are calling and why you are involved with the budget.

II. Budget

What are some important things about the budget that this person might want to know? You may want to ask some questions about their clients and the agency programs (if you don't know before you call). You can get into some of the main budget talking points here. It's important to get to the point so that the person can understand how the budget affects them, what they stand to lose, what can be done, and what you're offering them and asking them to do.

III. Involvement

This can be done several ways. You might share ways to get involved and propose some ideas that you see might fit well with this agency. You might start by gauging their interest in getting involved. When possible, secure involvement commitment and schedule needed follow-up.

IV. Wrap – Up

Answer any questions and make sure they have your contact info. Be sure to share information about any upcoming meetings or events. Let them know where they can find more information (www.protectohio.org, www.communitysolutions.com, www.policymattersohio.org are good places, you might know others). Ask them for other contacts (and see if they might be willing to call them). Thank them for their time and commitment (depending, you might also want to re-cap what they committed too and when you will follow-up)

V. Follow-up

Follow up the conversation with a fax, a letter, an email, some sort of correspondence that gives them an example (a flyer or something related) of what you talked about; include ways to get in touch with you and resources you mentioned when you wrapped up your phone call.

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How does the Budget Process work?
A timeline of the key players, what they're doing, and when FY '10-11

When?	Who?	What ?	Advocacy?
Jan. '08	Agencies, the Office of Budget and Management (OBM) and the Governor	Develop lists of major policy issues.	<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>↑</p> <p>These parts are done in secret</p> <p>This is where we get ready. Build coalitions, learn about the process, and make sure our legislators know that health, human services and education are important.</p> <p>↓</p> </div>
March '08	OBM	Releases Operating Budget guidance to agencies and meets with some agencies to discuss major issues.	
July 15 th '08	Agencies	Hand budgets over to OBM.	
July – October '08	OBM	Reviews and analyzes agency requests; budget hearings.	
Nov. '08 (Nov. 6-10)	Council of Economic Advisors	Meets the week of Nov. 6-10; OBM develops formal revenue estimate for FYs 2010-2011.	
Nov. – Dec. '08	OBM & Governor	Finalizes recommendations and briefs Governor. Governor provides feedback and/or approves budgets for those agencies.	
Dec. '08	OBM & agencies	Shares budget recommendations with agencies; appeals due Dec. 22	
Dec. – Jan. '09	OBM & Governor	OBM meets with Governor to finalize recommendations	<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>↑</p> <p>This is where our work is crucial!</p> <p>Write letters to your legislator. Write letters to the editor of your local paper. Call the House and Senate leadership. Tell your friends and neighbors. Testify. Rally!!</p> <p>↓</p> </div>
Feb. 10 '09		Executive budget released	
Feb. '09 to June '09	Governor, House of Representatives, and Senate	FY '10-'11 Operating Bills introduced. It starts in the House, introduced by Speaker Budish. The Finance Committee will work on the Budget and present it to the full House for a vote. Once the House agrees on the Budget, it moves to the Senate for a similar process. From the Senate it goes to Conference Committee to work out the differences. Then back for final approval.	
June 30, 2009	Governor	Last day for the Bill (Budget) to pass. It is not final until signed by the Governor.	
July 1, 2009		Happy new fiscal year!	

Raising the community voice at the policy level...

A balanced state budget: What is it and why is it important?

A balanced state budget is when **spending** equals **revenue**. Like many other states, Ohio is required to keep a balanced budget. To do this, the amount of money in the budget that is spent and earned (revenue) is monitored. To keep the budget balanced, funding for departments and programs is increased and decreased. This really isn't any different than how most of us balance checkbooks, but the state budget is balanced yearly; referred to as fiscal year. Ohio's **fiscal year** runs from July 1 to the following June 30, and is broken down into fall fiscal year (FFY) and spring fiscal year (SFY).

If spending does not equal revenue...

If the money required by departments and programs is higher than the money coming into the state's GRF, then there is a **deficit**. (The main pot where all spending comes out is called **GRF – the General Revenue Fund**). If the situation is reversed and revenue is higher than spending, then there is a **surplus**.

So what's going on with the budget right now?

Right now, Ohio is facing deficits in its budget. The solution to achieve a balanced budget is either to decrease spending or raise revenue. In Governor Strickland's Executive Budget, there are some **one-time funding sources**, and many cuts to spending. This one-time funding, mostly coming from a recently passed Federal Stimulus Plan, may not be available beyond FY10-11. Many people that do not want to see cuts in spending and do not want to rely on one-time funds encourage raising taxes *in a fair way* as the solution to get necessary funding for services and programs.

Before the state budget is passed, it goes through a lengthy process...

Every two years, the state budget is re-created. Right now decisions are being made in Columbus for the next biennium budget, meaning the budget will be planned for the next two fiscal years. So fiscal year 2009 will end June 30, 2009, and fiscal year 2010 will begin on July 1 of 2009. The process of creating a new biennium state budget has many steps. Here are the basics:

1. The process starts in July of even-numbered years. The Office of Budget and Management (a state office known as OBM) begins by corresponding with state agencies to see how much each agency requests for their own budget.
2. OBM works with the Governor and the Governor's staff to create an **Executive Budget**.
3. The Governor presents the Executive Budget first to the Ohio House of Representatives and it is introduced by the Speaker of the House in the form of a bill. This happens in early January or February of every odd-numbered year. The Ohio House of Representatives is made up of elected State Representatives.
4. The House of Representatives reviews the budget. Specifically, the **Finance Committee** of the House of Representatives and its **subcommittees** holds **hearings** on the budget. During those hearings, the public can express their views and opinions. The committee members discuss the Executive Budget and they can draft changes to it in the form of **amendments**. Then they present their changes to the rest of the House.
5. Once the House version of the budget is approved (by a vote), with any added amendments, it is passed on to the Senate. In the Senate, made up of elected State Senators, the budget review follows basically the same steps. Neither the House nor the Senate *has* to make changes to the Executive Budget, but based on the process of public testimony and feedback from various members of the public (like a Rally in front of the Statehouse), they make changes.

6. Once the budget passes through the House and the Senate, the whole budget bill (along with all the approved amendments) goes into to Conference Committee (where representative from both the House and the Senate debate the bill and try to come to agreement). The Conference Committee then prepares a report to present to the House and Senate.
7. If both the House and the Senate agree to the conference committee report, the bill then needs to be reviewed by executive agencies and the Governor. Once the Governor signs the budget, it becomes a law immediately. The Governor does have the power to **veto** (disapprove) the budget if he chooses. That means the House and Senate get back to work.

Some terms of importance:

- Appropriation bill:** A bill that identifies the way public money can be spent and the amount, manner, and purpose of the items the money can be spent on
- Corrections budget:** The Correction budget is not actually part of the process listed before, but it is part of balancing the state budget after the biennium budget has been passed. It's the states' way of correcting a miscalculation. If a department or program is spending more than revenue allows for, for example, a correction budget can create a bill to reduce spending *during* the biennium, rather than letting the increase in spending create a large deficit. An example of a correction budget bill is House Bill 40, which passed in February 2003. It reduced eligibility for day care vouchers for parents from 185% of the Federal Poverty Line to 150%.
- Federal Poverty Line:** Based on income and family size, the Federal Poverty Line determines what is considered poverty for individuals and family. The FPL guidelines are adjusted yearly and depend on family size.

The 2009 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia	
Persons in family	Poverty guideline
1	\$10,830
2	14,570
3	18,310
4	22,050
5	25,790
6	29,530
7	33,270
8	37,010

For families with more than 8 persons, add \$3,740 for each additional person.

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/09poverty.shtml>