

UNDERSTANDING YOUR STATE'S PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS

Every state is unique, and when it comes to public policy, that statement is certainly true. There are commonalities across states; however, each state has its own approach to policymaking, including how and when public policy decisions are made, how policies are implemented and how programs and services are funded by the state. In order to make the greatest impact on policies affecting babies, toddlers and their families, it is important to know what resources are available to help you navigate your state's particular public policy process.

Described below are resources to help you develop an understanding of your state and how policy decisions are made there.

The Governor

The National Governors' Association (NGA), <http://www.nga.org>, is a bi-partisan organization representing the collective voice of the nation's governors. NGA provides governors and their senior staff members with support on a range of key federal issues, including early childhood, through their Center for Best Practices (<http://www.nga.org/center>).

For advocates, this web site can be an important resource for learning about the policy information and solutions that governors and their staff are tracking. The NGA web site also provides you with access to information about your governor and his/her senior staff, and general information about the governor's function and decision making authority. To find this information, go to <http://www.nga.org> and click on "governors." This section of the web site includes links to each governor's web page, which also features information about state agencies (including those responsible for implementing public policies related to infants and toddlers).

State Legislative Activity

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), <http://www.ncsl.org>, is a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories. The NCSL web site is a tremendous resource on a wide array of issues related to state legislatures. In the "legislatures" section of their web site, <http://www.ncsl.org/LegislaturesElections/tabid/746/Default.aspx>, you can access information about legislative organization and procedure, the calendars for each state's legislature, legislative budget practice and interesting information about part-time vs. full-time legislatures and the compensation and staff capacity of state legislators.

A new feature on NCSL's web site is a legislative database which allows you to track early care and education legislation in the states from the most recent legislative year. The database brings you up-to-date, real-time information on early care and education bills that have been introduced and enacted in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. To search the database, visit <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/cyf/ECELD.cfm> and search by category, state, keyword, status, title or author.

To visit your state's legislative web site, go to: <http://www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm>, select your state and the content area you are interested in (you can also choose "home page" to go to the state legislature's main web page) and then click "Get Legislature Links." When you go to your state's web site, you will be able to view a legislative calendar with important deadlines, a listing of legislators (with their contact information and the committees on which they serve), a listing and the text of bills under consideration and their status within the legislative process.

The State Budget

The National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO), <http://www.nasbo.org>, is the professional membership organization of state finance officers. State finance officers are essentially the state's version of a chief financial officer (CFO). On the NASBO web site is a directory of all the state budget offices in the United States, including their web sites (<http://www.nasbo.org/Membership/MemberDirectory/tabid/77/Default.aspx>). If you click on the link for the state budget office for your state, you will find information about the process and timeline for developing the state's budget, contact information for state budget office employees (who will answer questions for you) and specific information about the state's budget.

For those of you with particular interest in state budgeting, NASBO published "Budget Processes in the States," which is a detailed overview of state budget agency organization and function, as well as state-by-state data on budget requirements and gubernatorial budget authority. To download the PDF file, go to:

<http://www.nasbo.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=AaAKTnjgucg=&tabid=80>.

State Administrative Agencies

State-level program administrators are responsible for implementing the programs established by legislation that is passed into law. State administrators are an important group of people with which to build relationships, because they can have significant control over program rules and regulations and can set the course for how services are provided. Each state has its own structure for administrative agencies, and the programs and services for infants, toddlers and their families are often spread out among a number of state agencies. To learn more about your state's agencies and who leads those agencies, go to: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/stategov/stategov.html> and click on the link for your state. There you will find the link for your state government's web site, which includes access to all the state agencies.

Other State Policy & Advocacy Resources for Infant-Toddler Advocates

For more detailed information about legislative and administrative policy activity in your state, it is helpful to get connected to state-based organizations that follow these processes closely.

Consider signing up for email lists of your state's child advocacy organization and/or the advocacy network for your professional association (such as the state American Academy of Pediatrics chapter or the state mental health association chapter). To find the child advocacy organization in your state, go to: http://www.voices.org/pages/page.asp?page_id=23050 and click on the map of the United States.