

# HOW TO DEVELOP A LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY TEAM AT YOUR CASA PROGRAM

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Schedule a training using the Basics of Legislative Advocacy curriculum. Invite staff, board members and, most importantly, volunteers who can share their personal CASA stories.

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Choose a volunteer as your LAT chair who will organize and lead your LAT so that you can limit staff time expended on legislative advocacy. Normally, one member of your staff should be able to oversee and support your advocacy efforts.

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Become familiar with your legislators' committee membership, tenure, etc., and schedule meetings with those legislators and staff in their district. They will be more responsive to constituents who:

- Thank them for their support during the previous legislative session and let them know how state funding and other child welfare system improvements have positively impacted your program and the children you serve.
  - Use the opportunity to start building a relationship or cultivate an existing one.
  - Share their CASA stories.
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Schedule initial meetings at legislator's office or in your office. Collect business cards from staff members and get to know their names, titles and faces so you can build relationships with them as well as your legislator. Bring a packet of information about your program and your contact information. Send a thank you letter for the legislator's time and offer to be a resource for them.

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Create opportunities to interact with your legislators in order to build relationships, increase awareness and reinforce their knowledge of CASA. Your goal is to cultivate these relationships by:

- Inviting them and their staff to observe CASA volunteers in court hearings and meetings with the judge and volunteers.
  - Inviting them as a special guest to an event such as a volunteer appreciation event or swearing-in ceremony.
  - Inviting them to meet with volunteers at your office.
  - Sending them your newsletter, annual report and news clippings about your program.
  - Sending them information about child abuse and neglect in your community, including news items, or any specific issues you've discussed with them or that are affecting your local child welfare system.
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Meet with them again the summer before the legislative session starts. By this time, Texas CASA will have (or will be close to finalizing) our legislative priorities which you may share with them. Share a story from one of your cases, using first names only, to make your point about the legislation that means the most to you. The legislators will listen when you make it personal and refer to an actual child for whom you have advocated.





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# HELPFUL TIPS FOR LAT MEMBERS

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## **YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT.**

It is not necessary to have every answer or statistic at your fingertips. The relationship and the reliance on you as a trusted resource is the most important thing. Don't make up answers but offer to get back to them with the answers or with a resource they can use to find the answers.

## **NEVER MISS A CHANCE TO TELL A PERSONAL CASA STORY.**

Legislators and staffers meet with people every day, all day long, about statistics, economics and policies. Stories (without names or other identifying information) grab their attention and personalize the interaction—they are also what they remember most. Stories based on your experiences as a volunteer, your passion to help children and the fact that you are a constituent are your most important and persuasive attributes which can help you explain the CASA cause.

## **REMINDE THEM WHAT CASA IS AND WHAT WE DO.**

Don't assume they know what CASA is or does just because they already support CASA or because they say they know. Legislators and their staff meet with many constituents so it is always prudent to provide a brief overview of CASA and the work that we do during introductory meetings.

## **DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEGISLATORS' STAFF MEMBERS.**

Developing relationships with your legislator's staff, especially the district director, legislative director and chief of staff, is essential. These are the people who research the bills, gather background information and keep the legislator up to date on current issues and legislation; they will be your main contacts during session. Explaining your concerns and suggestions to them directly will get your issue before the legislator.

## **BE VERY CAREFUL AROUND PRIMARY AND ELECTION TIMES.**

As a 501(c)(3), CASA is prohibited from campaigning or appearing to endorse one candidate over another. When your legislator has an opponent, it is usually not a good idea for a local CASA program to invite your legislator to speak in a public venue, accept an award or receive media coverage in conjunction with a CASA activity or news event.

**TEXAS CASA IS HERE TO HELP AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS! PLEASE CONTACT THE PUBLIC POLICY TEAM AT [PUBLICPOLICY@TEXASCASA.ORG](mailto:PUBLICPOLICY@TEXASCASA.ORG) FOR GUIDANCE.**

