

COUNTY ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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ABOUT CCAO

The [County Commissioners Association of Ohio](#) advances effective county government for Ohio through legislative advocacy, education and training, technical assistance and research, quality enterprise service programs, and greater citizen awareness and understanding of county government.

Counties act as an arm of state government and represent the state through the delivery of services to residents in many areas, such as providing justice and public safety services, workforce preparedness, protecting children, administering elections, serving vulnerable Ohioans and maintaining roads and bridges.

As such, counties are heavily impacted by the actions of the Ohio General Assembly and state offices; therefore, it is essential that we continue to prioritize the state/county partnership.

CCAO works to continually strengthen the partnership by providing legislative advocacy on behalf of our members as well as updating our members about legislation and rules impacting county government.



OVERVIEW

As an association of elected officials, CCAO is able to employ a two-pronged advocacy approach. CCAO's government relations staff engages with the General Assembly and Executive Branch on a regular basis and can provide information on how state policies affect counties in general, while CCAO members (commissioners, executives, and council members) can tell legislators and executive staff more specifics on how their individual county will be affected by proposals. As fellow elected officials who represent the same constituents, CCAO members speak with legislators on a more equal footing with words that carry more weight.

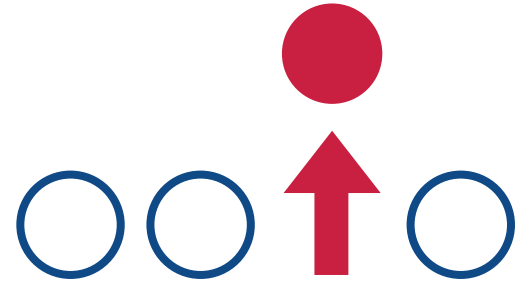
This advocacy toolkit is intended to provide tips on effectively advocating to your legislators and state officials, and to provide members with examples and samples of what other members have done to advocate for their counties. The toolkit is split into two parts: the first gives ideas and advice on how to advocate based on what members have found successful in the past, while the second part contains samples of effective advocacy materials. This includes testimony to the General Assembly, resolutions passed by boards of commissioners, social media posts, and more.



REMEMBER YOUR UNIQUE ROLE

Commissioners have a particular advantage when it comes to advocating to legislators and state officials that few others share. As an elected official who serves the same constituents, you can engage with legislators on an equal footing. You aren't an interest group with an agenda to push; you're a fellow public servant.

Counties are political subdivisions that are tasked with carrying out many of the policies that the General Assembly and the Executive Branch put into place. As an elected representative of the county, and the county's main budgetary authorities, your expertise can help shine a light on how the policies they are considering will play out on the local level.



USE A VARIETY OF COMMUNICATION METHODS

Legislators, like all people, have certain communication methods they may prefer more than others. Some may prefer phone calls over texts, or emails over phone calls. It's a matter of finding out your legislator's preference so you can communicate through a medium that will allow you to effectively communicate your message.

This also can enable you to show when something is of great importance by deviating from the normal communication method. If you normally text and suddenly call, it suggests to the legislator that there is something important going on.

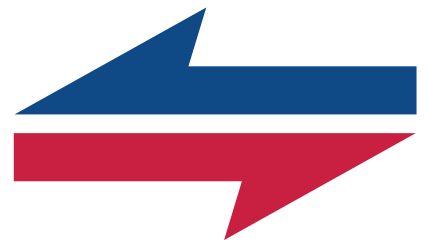


BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

CCAO members' relationships with their legislators are arguably the greatest advocacy asset of the Association. These relationships are the foundation of successful advocacy, enabling you to share your message and influence policy.

Make non-issue related contact: Wish them happy birthday, congratulate them on winning elections, wish them well if you see they have a new child or grandchild. It is important to get to know them as a person or friend, as well as develop mutual respect, even if their position on policy issues is different than yours. Learn what projects they are working on and what their interests are. Ask questions and be curious about them.

Help their causes: Relationships are a two-way street. This goes for legislative relationships just as much as other relationships. Offering to help your legislator achieve their policy goals, even if they don't pertain to county government, can strengthen your relationship and make it more likely they will seek to help you in the future. Ways to do this will be discussed later as well in the future.



MAKE CONTACTS WITH STATEHOUSE STAFF

Like commissioners, executives, and council members, legislators have busy schedules. Getting to know their staffers in the Statehouse can help you get on their calendar and ensure your communication or materials reach the legislator.

Additionally, since there is no requirement that legislative aides be from the district that their boss represents, educating legislative aides on issues important to your county is vital. This will help them recognize when bills have local effects.

EDUCATE THEM ON COUNTY ISSUES



As CCAO members know, counties are very multi-faceted. Legislators without a local government background may not understand how a given issue would affect their county. As experts on county government, you can help your legislators appreciate how a piece of legislation will impact your operations and residents, whether positively or negatively.

Provide your legislators with specific facts and figures. Stories and anecdotes can help put a human face to issues in your communities, but hard data can help tell your county's story too. CCAO staff is always happy to help you put data together!

As mentioned above, this can be particularly important for legislative aides.

THERE ARE NO ENEMIES

Just because your legislator may not vote in favor of a position you advocate for does not mean they will always vote against your position. Each bill is different, and each vote has different circumstances. Do not let defeats on individual bills imperil a meaningful relationship with your legislator.



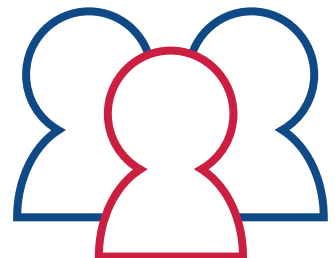
INVITE YOUR LEGISLATORS TO YOUR FACILITIES

Inviting your legislators to your board of commissioners meetings can be a valuable experience for them, letting them see first hand how county commissioners operate.

Other useful experiences would be to have them tour the county jail, visit county JFS agencies, experience first-hand the condition of county roads, and any number of other in-person visits to help them grasp the conditions on the ground. This also affords another opportunity to get to know your legislators and build relationships.

VISIT YOUR LEGISLATORS IN THE COMMUNITY

Another fruitful means of building relationships and enhancing your advocacy efforts is to visit your legislators in the community. Community events such as ribbon cuttings, the county fair, or holiday events/parades are great opportunities to meet and talk with your legislators and help connect them with constituents.



REMEMBER: LEGISLATORS AND STATE OFFICIALS ARE CONSTANTLY BEING ENGAGED WITH BY SEVERAL INTERESTED PARTIES ABOUT EVERY ISSUE. IF YOU CHOOSE NOT TO ENGAGE, YOUR PERSPECTIVE MAY BE LOST.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

There's a variety of practices that can help enhance your Statehouse advocacy other than those listed above.

PROVIDE PERIODIC UPDATES

Provide updates to your General Assembly delegation on what is happening both in the county at large and the actions that you as commissioners, executives, or council members have taken. These can include formal events such as annual "state of the county" presentations or informal actions such as circulating written publications.

Shelby County produces annual reviews of the county's goals and progress, as well as goals for the coming year. It provides detailed and concise information on county projects such as a new emergency communications system, an upgrade to a wastewater treatment plant. The document also mentions difficulties the county may soon face.

Licking County produces monthly updates on a wide variety of happenings around the county. These include lists of upcoming community events, check-ins on county bodies such as the soil and water district, recognitions county bodies have received, and space for each commissioner to provide their own message.

Providing this information to both your legislators and the community can prove invaluable. First, it helps educate both audiences about what counties do, and it can help flag potential issues early so legislators can work proactively to prevent a problem from developing rather than reactively to help respond to a problem. Second, by regularly circulating information, civic engagement may increase, and it could become easier to find people to serve on local boards.

Sample Update, Annual: [Shelby County's 2024 Progress Report](#)

Sample Update, Monthly: [Licking County's March 2024 Update](#)

GO ON THE RECORD

Acts of interpersonal advocacy, such as talking with legislators over the phone or at a party dinner, are vital, but just as important is speaking to the General Assembly and Executive Branch in your role as fellow elected officials. There are two main ways to do this: through resolutions and through testimony.

Resolutions

Boards of county commissioners and county councils can pass resolutions both for statutory purposes and for ceremonial or symbolic purposes. One of the latter usages of resolutions is to officially thank other entities and to

encourage them to take certain actions. This can be a powerful tool because it shows your legislators what the official position of the county is and can either provide them with local support for a vote or help them make their decision on how to vote. Thanking your legislators through an official action also can go a long way.

Sample Resolution, [State Operating Budget General Provisions](#)

Sample Resolution, [State Operating Budget Indigent Defense Provisions](#)

Sample Resolution, [State Operating Budget Jail Funding Provisions](#)

Testimony

Another way to advocate on the record is to provide testimony to legislative committees. Testifying is arguably the best way to express to the whole legislature your support or opposition to active legislation. It affords you the opportunity to provide a local perspective on provisions of the bill in question and to share the likely effects it will have on legislators' districts. Testimony can be given orally in-person at the committee hearing or provided as written-only testimony. The first hearing a bill receives is reserved for testimony from the bill sponsor(s), the second hearing is typically reserved for testimony from proponents, and the third hearing is typically reserved for opponents and other interested parties. Any subsequent hearings are usually a mixture of proponents, opponents, and interested parties. The CCAO Policy Team is always available to help our members with preparing and submitting testimony.

Sample Testimony: [House Bill 33, Morgan County Commissioner Adam Shriver on Jesse Owens State Park Funding](#)

Sample Testimony: [Senate Bill 155, Medina County Commissioner Aaron Harrison on I-71 Interchange](#)

OTHER ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE CONT.

UTILIZE THE MEDIA

Another tool in advocating for your county is by utilizing the media, both traditional and social. Using the media can help spread the word about issues facing your county and help raise local support for your advocacy efforts. It also can be a useful educational tool when counties are facing issues of high public interest.

Traditional media

The traditional media (newspapers, TV stations, radio stations) is often a staple of a community for decades and thus confers some level of legitimacy that other media cannot. Op-eds or guest columns in newspapers and sitting down for interviews with television or radio stations can give you the ability to make long-form arguments more readily than social media.

Op-Ed Sample: [Perry County Commissioner Ben Carpenter on Property Taxes](#)

Interview Sample: [All Sides with Ann Fisher – Renewable Energy Episode featuring Pickaway County Commissioner Gary Scherer \(8-4-21\)](#)

*Social media*¹

As the 21st Century has progressed, social media has taken on a greater prominence with each passing year. Social media, particularly the two platforms which have traditionally been the most popular, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), provides an opportunity to speak and engage more directly with legislators and your community than through traditional media. Other social media platforms that you may find useful include YouTube and Instagram.

Social media can be a useful tool to highlight the role that commissioners, executives, and council members play in your communities and, when appropriate, show support or appreciation for actions the legislature has taken.

Sample Facebook Post: [Ashtabula County Commissioner Casey Kozlowski on County Court Consolidation Testimony](#)

Sample X/Twitter Post: [Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus on Governor Mike DeWine and Tourism](#)

Sample YouTube Post: [Clermont County Commissioner Bonnie Batchler on Meals on Wheels](#)

Sample LinkedIn Post: [Scioto County Commissioner Bryan Davis Thanking Statewide Leaders for Portsmouth Revitalization Grants](#)

¹ Please note that state and federal law regarding when social media use by a public official on a private account is classified as a government action is still not a fully settled issue. A recent U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Lindke v. Freed* offered some clarification on public officials' rights to block constituents on social media when using their personal account. [The National Association of Counties](#) has provided a brief analysis of this decision and how it pertains to counties.

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

There are several useful sites and links that can help aid your advocacy efforts.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OFFERINGS

Members also may want to avail themselves of several resources that the [General Assembly](#) itself offers. The legislature's website has a section where one can [create an account and receive email alerts on bills](#) you select. The legislative calendar and an easy-to-use search function for introduced legislation is offered on the site as well.

Additionally, each chamber has its own website ([House of Representatives](#); [Senate](#)) where you can find more information about legislative committees and the legislators themselves. Many legislative offices have a newsletter you can sign up to receive.

The [Legislative Service Commission's website](#) also offers helpful resources. LSC prepares bill analyses and fiscal notes as legislation moves through the General Assembly which can be found on individual bills' pages on the General Assembly's website. [Budget analysis](#) is hosted on LSC's website, as is another useful publication called [Members Briefs](#). These are short, easily digestible overviews of important state issues, such as Current Agricultural Usage Value taxation and how child abuse and neglect reports are investigated by Public Children Services Agencies.

Another valuable tool is [The Ohio Channel](#), which broadcasts livestreams of legislative committees and archives the recordings. If there is a piece of

legislation you are interested in, you can watch committee hearings on it without having to travel to Columbus.

CCAO

Finally, CCAO itself! As your professional organization, [CCAO](#) is dedicated to supporting you and helping your county succeed. Teamwork for a better tomorrow!

CCAO's facility

CCAO's offices are conveniently located just two blocks from Capitol Square, the hub of Ohio's state government. Located on Capitol Square are the Statehouse (which includes Senate offices), the Riffe Tower (which contains House offices and some executive offices), and the Rhodes Tower (which contains executive offices). If you are visiting Columbus to testify at a committee, meet with a legislator or state agency official, or for any other reason, you are more than welcome to park at CCAO's offices.

Our building has a visitors office for members to use if they would like to work or take virtual meetings while visiting Columbus. Additionally, the building also houses CEBCO, CORSA, and the CCAO Service Corporation so members in Columbus can conveniently meet with staff from those organizations as well.

If you plan on being in Columbus, even if it is for a non-CCAO purpose, please let us know and feel free to

make use of our facilities!

Policy materials

CCAO produces two weekly newsletters: [Statehouse Report](#) and [Counties Current](#). Past issues of both, and a sign-up sheet for circulation, are available on [CCAO's website](#).

Statehouse Report focuses on issues in either the General Assembly or the executive branch and aims to keep our members informed regarding active policy discussions. The CCAO Policy Team also provides advocacy tips and talking points on developing policy areas through this newsletter. *Statehouse Report* is distributed on Friday afternoons.

Counties Current is a more generalized newsletter and includes news items pertaining to counties, statewide or federal news items, grants and funding opportunities, educational opportunities, and important dates. *Counties Current* is distributed on Monday mornings.

Additionally, a new feature on CCAO's website is the [County Bill Tracker](#), where CCAO monitors bills that may affect counties to keep the membership informed of what the bills would do and where a bill is in the legislative process. The Tracker divides bills into CCAO Standing Committee jurisdiction and spotlights a select few bills on the Tracker's home page.

