

CASA CAPITOL DAY

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY DAY TOOLKIT



CASA AT THE CAPITOL

Overview

As a state CASA association, we strive to continuously raise the visibility of the statewide CASA network at the capitol. One of the best methods for doing so is by hosting a Legislative Advocacy Day at the Louisiana State Capitol during the legislative session. However, to be successful, *we need the help of the local programs.*

Face-to-face meetings with your legislator can be a powerful opportunity to advance the CASA mission and CASA's public policy priorities in the state. The meeting can also position you as a reliable expert on child welfare issues in your community and an important ally for your legislator after a successful meeting.

We know that legislative advocacy can be intimidating if you don't know what to expect. We want to help you plan well in advance of the advocacy day, so that you can be focused, organized, and prepared .

To aid you in this outreach, we have created this toolkit to provide you with the information that you will need to maximize your experience at capitol day.

This toolkit includes information, ideas, tips, and samples for your Legislative Advocacy Day efforts.

Why participate in a Legislative Advocacy Day?

Legislative advocacy is about making your voice heard in your state capitol. State legislators are much more likely to listen and take action on funding or legislation if they hear from their constituents. They want to know what matters and to serve the interests of the voters in their district/state. Most will appreciate the knowledge that CASA staff and volunteers hold regarding children who have been victims of abuse and neglect.

Engaging state legislators is important for CASA programs in order to increase awareness and secure support for your legislative agenda. A Legislative Advocacy Day can bring in voices from around the state and could be key in helping to shape the laws that affect our state's most vulnerable children.

Who should attend?

You will want to bring local program staff and CASA volunteers who will be able to advocate on the importance of CASA volunteers' advocacy for the best interest of the abused and neglected children in foster care. For the same reasons that they are effective advocates in court, CASA volunteers are effective in speaking up for Louisiana's children.

In addition to staff and volunteers, you might also consider having other champions join the Legislative Advocacy Day. The goal of engaging champions is to create a local chorus of CASA champions that will speak to your value in your communities and the importance of your public policy priorities to your work. Potential local champions could include board members, former volunteers, donors, former foster youth and/or those served by a CASA, education leaders or former politicians.

Legislative Advocacy Day Goals

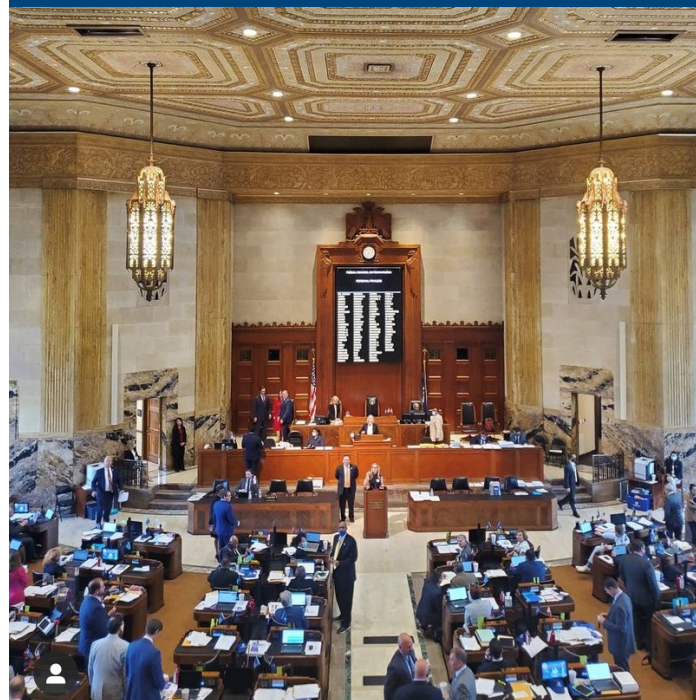
Goal 1 - Establish or enhance relationships with state legislators and their staff.

Goal 2 - Educate state legislators and their staff about the CASA program and what is in the best interest of children in foster care.

Goal 3 - Inform state legislators of CASA policy and funding priorities

Goal 4 - Empower state legislators who support CASA to become champions and persuade undecided legislators to support your legislative priorities.

Goal 5 - Diminish or neutralize any opposition from legislators to CASA's public policy priorities.



Who should you meet with during the Legislative Advocacy Day?

As a participant, YOU will have the most influence with your own state Senate and House representatives since these legislators rely on their constituents to keep them in office. That's why it's important for you to set up meetings with your own legislators on that day.

You also may consider scheduling meetings with any champions for child welfare issues in the state legislature, even if you do not live in their district, as they could be a champion for issues that impact the CASA network in the future. Also, don't be afraid to meet with legislators who may not agree with you on your priorities, because you still may find common ground. It is important to educate your supporters as well as opponents about CASA policy priorities in order to influence their actions and votes.



How will Louisiana CASA help you prepare for the Legislative Advocacy Day?

This year's CASA Capitol Day is being held in conjunction with the CASA Conference. Attendees will receive support in preparing in advance for the Capitol Day. Also, the morning of Capitol Day, conference attendees will receive a packet of everything you will need to have a great Capitol Day experience.

Prior to the CASA Conference, Louisiana CASA will hold a Capitol Day training via Zoom to discuss the logistics and priorities of the day. It is highly recommended that all attendees participate in the training.

What is Advocacy?

How is advocacy different than lobbying?

Lobbying is one kind of advocacy. **Not all advocacy is lobbying, but all lobbying is advocacy.** Louisiana law defines a "lobbyist" as: (a) Any person who is employed or engaged for compensation to act in a representative capacity for the purpose of lobbying if lobbying constitutes one of the principal duties of such employment or engagement; (b) Any person who acts in a representative capacity and makes an expenditure. LaR.S. 24:50 et seq. On the other hand, **advocacy** is the means by which we work to shape public policy to promote a cause or idea. Advocacy encompasses a wide range of activities designed to influence decision makers:

- Educating the public;
- Organizing a base of support;
- Informing policy makers; and,
- Advocating for the adoption or rejection of legislation

Informing policy makers: CAN WE REALLY SAY/DO THAT?

There are a number of safe and permissible activities that CASA advocates can consider.

- CASA advocates can inform legislators and policy makers about the needs of abused and neglected children and the CASA programs.
- CASA advocates can encourage decision makers to support the CASA agenda.
- CASA advocates can encourage legislators to make funding for CASA and the children we serve a legislative priority.
- CASA advocates can invite legislators and policy makers to visit a local program to learn more about CASA and the work of CASA.
- CASA advocates can praise and thank legislators for support BUT without making representations about character or promising reward or retribution at the ballot box.

There are comments and activities that CASA advocates should avoid:

- CASA advocates should avoid making any representation that CASA supports or opposes any particular elected official.
- CASA advocates should avoid making any representation regarding reward or retribution at the next election.
- CASA advocates should avoid making any expenditure to benefit the elected official. For example: CASA advocates can meet the official, or their staff, for coffee or lunch but should not pay for the meal—ask for separate checks. It is permissible to offer refreshments, coffee, water, etc., when the official, or their staff, visits the program. Additionally, CASA advocates can present the official, or their staff, with CASA lapel pins as a method of raising awareness, but do not purchase and present the official with a gift as a means of showing appreciation.

How to make a difference during the Legislative Session

Advocacy should be an ongoing process, but visibility during the Legislative Session is critically important. If elected officials are familiar with CASA, they may reach out for information and feedback on various bills that affect CASA and the children we serve. Be prepared to offer information and assistance. If the CASA advocate cannot answer the question, be honest and indicate that the information will be located and provided—and be sure to follow-up.

Understand the legislative process and the language of legislation. Advocacy during the Legislative Session can take the form of communication with individual legislators or appearing in the Committee hearing on legislation. Email is an effective way to communicate with individual legislators. Track the legislation on the Legislature's website, www.legis.la.gov, to identify the date a bill will be heard in Committee. Email your position to the Committee members shortly before the bill is scheduled for hearing. Be sure to state the Bill number and whether you are asking the Legislator to support or oppose the Bill in the subject line of the email. (Example: Please Support Bill XXXXX)

Louisiana CASA Advocacy Team

The CASA Advocacy Team is responsible for identifying policy and legislative issues important to the CASA network and the children and families served. For more information, visit the government relations page of the [member portal](#).

Members Include:

Joy Bruce, CASA of New Orleans (Committee Chair)
 Liz Betz, Capital Area CASA
 Rob Carlisle, Child Advocacy Services
 David Duplechian, Family & Youth Counseling Agency
 Sherry Guarisco, Louisiana CASA Board Member



The Committee Hearing is an important opportunity to inform legislators of CASA advocates' position regarding pending legislation. CASA advocates do not have to speak in the Committee Hearing to register support or opposition to a bill. Witness cards are available in the committee room to indicate the CASA advocates' position and whether the advocate wishes to speak (testify) in the Committee Hearing. Green cards are used to indicate support of a bill and red cards are used to indicate opposition to a bill. The card should be completely filled out and signed, including checking the appropriate box to speak before the Committee. A separate card must be filled out for each bill. Comments on the cards are important and will be made a part of the permanent public record. (Note: the CASA advocate must be present at the Committee Hearing to fill out and sign the support/opposition cards.) Once the bill goes to the floor, email your position to your individual legislators shortly before the bill is scheduled for consideration. Remember to include the bill number and requested action in the email subject line.

Policy Priorities to Consider:

- Seek new/additional funding for CASA programs.
- Receive or strengthen statutory authority for CASA programs and volunteers in our state.
- Support efforts to develop better services and supports for children, parents and families dealing with substance use and abuse or mental health issues.
- Improve services and supports for older and transitioning foster youth.
- Support policies that improve educational outcomes for children and youth in state care.
- Help prevent human trafficking and meet the needs of trafficking victims by supporting needed resources and policy change.
- Support broad stakeholder involvement in planning for and implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act.
- Support Early Childhood Mental Health initiatives.

2022 CASA Capitol Day Policy Priorities:

Will be posted after pre-filing ends on March 4th, 2022.



Scheduling the Meeting

To aid you in scheduling your meeting with legislators, we have provided sample templates for meeting request emails, as well as, phone scripts to give you some ideas of how to contact your legislator.

Please contact us if you need help finding your legislators' contact information.

In order to have the best possible information provided to you in your Capitol Day packet, please notify Louisiana CASA by **Friday, March 25, 2022** of the following information:

- Time and location of your meeting
- Legislators you will be meeting with

If you would like to use the space that Louisiana CASA will have available for legislative meetings, please contact Wanda Joseph at wjoseph@louisianacasa.org to check availability.

At the meeting.

- **Introduce yourself.** Tell legislators about your position or role with your CASA program.
 - At the beginning of the meeting, make sure to provide them with your business card. You will also want to make sure to collect business cards from staff members and get to know their names and titles so that you can talk to them as well as the legislator when you make future contact.
- **State the reason for your visit.** Be clear about why you are there, why they should be interested (remember to use local examples), and what you want them to do.
 - Give out copies of the materials at the beginning of the meeting so everyone can follow along during your discussion and ask any questions they may have about the issues or materials.
- **Provide an overview.** What is CASA program advocacy? Why and how do courts rely on CASA volunteer advocates? Specifically, what does your organization do for children?
 - Don't assume they know the basics of CASA programs and advocacy just because they are already supporters or because they say they know. Chances are they don't, and those that do can always use a reminder and may even learn something new.
- **Make the state/district connection.** Our CASA program serves __[number]__ children in your state or district.
 - Reference the state fact sheet or relevant data included in your own materials. (The scoop sheets will be provided by Louisiana CASA).
- **Tell a personal CASA story.** Legislators and staffers meet with people every day about statistics, economics and policies. Your stories (without using names or other identifying information) will grab their attention and pull at their heartstrings.
- **Show the outcomes and the need.** Why is the program worth supporting? What is great about what you do? If possible, tell a brief story about your work in action. Cite child well-being and improved long-term outcomes, in addition to cost savings, if you have that information and it is positive. Emphasize that more children need advocates and that you need support to continue serving all children.
- **Stay positive:** Remember to remain positive and flexible throughout your meeting. Most offices want to help children in need—we just have to help them find their way.
- **Invite comments and questions.** Engage your legislator in dialogue. Don't worry if they ask you something you don't know the answer to. Simply tell them you don't know, but would be happy to find out and get back to them.

- **Ask for a commitment.** If you don't ask your legislators for action, you won't see any. If they decline, encourage them to think about it and let them know you will keep in touch. While the focus of your Capitol Day asks should be on gaining commitment on your policy and funding priorities, meeting with your state legislators offers you the opportunity to help you establish yourself as a thought leader. Consider asking your state legislator:
 - If they need testimony on child welfare issues at any upcoming hearings. If there are no hearings scheduled at the time, offer to be a resource for the future.
 - If they are willing to recommend that you participate in advisory councils with key state agencies, the Governor's office or other relevant groups in your state. (You will want to be strategic on who you might ask to do this).
 - To visit your program or offer to put together an event in the state or district.
 - If they have any questions, offer to serve as a resource for them if they need more information about this request or other child welfare issues in the future.
- **Thank legislators and their staff frequently.** You can never thank them enough for their time and support of the CASA program. If they have voted in favor of a policy or funding priority, make sure to thank them for specifically for their support of that legislation.
- **Ask to take a photo with them.** If you take a photo, be sure that you can share the photo on social media or in your newsletter.

What materials will you receive?

The morning of Capitol Day, Louisiana CASA staff will provide packets of information for attendees that will include the following items:

- **An agenda** outlining the activities, breaking down where and when attendees should be over the course of the day.
- **Meeting schedule** with the time of the meeting, who you are meeting with, the the location and contact information for staff in case they are running late.
- **State legislator bios** highlighting their background, committees and other relevant information.
 - You should also research your legislators if you don't know much about them such as finding out their positions on your policy priorities.
- **Talking points** outlining CASA policy positions.
- **Hand-outs** to leave with elected officials.
- **A map** with all Capitol Day activity locations.

After the meeting.

The activities following the legislative meetings will be almost as important as the meetings themselves. After your meetings, you will want to do the following things:

- **Report on your visit.** As soon as possible after their visit, you should jot down a summary of the meeting and let Louisiana CASA staff know how it went. We would also love to receive any photos that you may have taken during the visit.
- **Follow-up.** Send thank-you notes to all legislators and staff you met with during Capitol Day. A sample thank you is included in the toolkit. If you promised additional information, you should send it to the legislator's office as quickly as you can.
- **Share the Story.** Let everyone know about your Capitol Day experience. Newsletters, social media, email blasts, etc. are all great ways to get the word out.



How to build on the Legislative Advocacy Day.

As local program staff and volunteers, you should continue to cultivate the relationships with state legislators and their staff after the in-person visit.

We recommend that you create opportunities to interact with your legislators in order to build relationships, increase awareness and reinforce their knowledge of the CASA program. Cultivating these relationships can be achieved by the following:

- Inviting them and their staff to observe CASA volunteers in court hearings and meeting 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 newspapers 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.
- Scheduling more visits with your legislators and their staff members to continue to discuss the issues and make requests as you have them throughout the year.

Sample Templates

Initial Meeting Request Email to State Senators

Subject Line:

Dear [Senator _____],

I am the Executive Director of [local program name]. Our program provides highly trained court appointed special advocate (CASA) volunteers, who advocate for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect and are in the custody of the state. [Program Name] is an integral partner in the community, working alongside our community stakeholders to ensure that our children have an opportunity to thrive in a safe, permanent, and loving home.

On April 12th, [program name] will be participating in a statewide Advocacy Day at the Louisiana State Capitol. I would like to request a brief meeting with you on behalf of myself and [insert other attendees] to share information about our efforts to ensure the well-being of the children in the district that you represent. Are you available to meet in your office at one of the following times?

[Suggest Time 1]

[Suggest Time 2]

[Suggest Time 3]

If none of these times work, please let me know of a time that would fit better with your schedule. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely

[Be sure to include a phone number in your signature]

Initial Meeting Request Email to State House Representatives

Subject Line:

Dear [Representative _____],

I am the Executive Director of [local program name]. Our program provides highly trained court appointed special advocate (CASA) volunteers, who advocate for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect and are in the custody of the state. [Program Name] is an integral partner in the community, working alongside our community stakeholders to ensure that our children have an opportunity to thrive in a safe, permanent, and loving home.

On April 12th, [program name] will be participating in a statewide Advocacy Day at the Louisiana State Capitol. I would like to request a brief meeting with you on behalf of myself and [insert other attendees] to share information about our efforts to ensure the well-being of the children in the district that you represent. Are you available to meet in the [capitol press room] at one of the following times?

[Suggest Time 1]

[Suggest Time 2]

[Suggest Time 3]

If none of these times work, please let me know of a time that would fit better with your schedule. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely

[Be sure to include a phone number in your signature]

Follow-up Meeting Request Email to State Senator

Subject Line:

Good afternoon [Senator _____],

I am following up on an email that I had sent last week, requesting a brief meeting with you during our statewide advocacy day on April 12th. We would really appreciate the opportunity to share information about our efforts to ensure the well-being of the children in the district that you represent. Are you available to meet in your office at one of the following times?

[Suggest Time 1]

[Suggest Time 2]

[Suggest Time 3]

If none of these times work, please let me know of a time that would fit better with your schedule. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely

[Be sure to include a phone number in your signature]

Follow-up Meeting Request Email to State House Representative

Subject Line:

Good afternoon [Representative_____]

I am following up on an email that I had sent last week, requesting a brief meeting with you during our statewide advocacy day on April 12th. We would really appreciate the opportunity to share information about our efforts to ensure the well-being of the children in the district that you represent. Are you available to meet in the [state capitol pressroom] at one of the following times?

[Suggest Time 1]

[Suggest Time 2]

[Suggest Time 3]

If none of these times work, please let me know of a time that would fit better with your schedule. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely

[Be sure to include a phone number in your signature]

Phone Call Script to Request a Meeting

Receptionist: Good Afternoon/ Morning, [Senator/ Representative _____] Office,

You: Hi! My name is [Name] and I am the Executive Director of [Program Name]. I am calling to let [Senator/ Representative _____] know that several staff and volunteers from our organization will be participating in a statewide Advocacy Day at the state capitol on April 12th. We would love to provide [him/her] with information about our efforts to advocate for the abused and neglected children in the district that [he/she] represents and to thank [him/her] for [his/her] continued support. Would [he/she] be available for a brief meeting on that day?

Receptionist: What day was that again?

You: April 12th

Receptionist: And who are you with again?

You: I'm the Executive Director of [Program Name]. We provide court appointed special advocate volunteers who advocate for abused and neglected children.

Receptionist: Okay, I will send this request to him and let you know if he will be available to meet.

You: Great! I can be reached at [phone number].

Receptionist: OK, I got it.

You: Thank you so much. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Follow-up Phone Call Script

Receptionist: Good Afternoon/ Morning, [Senator/Rep _____] Office,

You: Hi! My name is [Name] and I am the Executive Director of [Program Name]. I wanted to follow up on the call that I made last week to see if [senator/rep _____] would be available to meet with myself, staff, and volunteers on April 12th as part of our statewide Advocacy Day at the state capitol.

OR

Receptionist: Good Afternoon/ Morning, [Senator/Rep _____] Office,

You: Hi! My name is [Name] and I am the Executive Director of [Program Name]. I wanted to follow up on an email that I sent last week to see if [senator/rep _____] would be available to meet with myself, staff, and volunteers on April 12th as part of our statewide Advocacy Day at the state capitol.

Thank You Letter to Legislator

[Date]

[Full Name of State Representative/Senator Here]

Address

[City, State, Zip Code]

Dear State Representative/Senator [Last Name]

On behalf of [insert program name] and the children we serve, thank you for sharing your insights with us during our recent meeting. Court appointed special advocate (CASA) volunteers help child victims of abuse and neglect heal and thrive through a dedicated one-on-one relationship with a volunteer providing best-interest advocacy. Our one-of-a-kind volunteer movement helps ensure that every child who has experienced abuse or neglect can have a caring, consistent, and highly trained volunteer to fight for their best interests and to help them find the road home, wherever it lies. The [program name] is an integral partner in the community, providing information to our courts to help judges make the most well-informed decisions and working alongside our community stakeholders to assure that our children are safe, have a permanent home and the opportunity to thrive.

Your perspective on the current legislative landscape and your thoughts on state funding were invaluable. We all benefitted from your insightful comments on the important issues impacting the children in our community who have experienced abuse and neglect.

As you know, the state of Louisiana is an important partner in our efforts to provide CASA advocacy, which is strongly associated with improved outcomes for child victims.

Thank you again for meeting with us. We look forward to working with you in the future. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

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Conclusion

While participating in a State Legislative Advocacy Day involves time and effort, the benefits of getting acquainted or furthering your relationship with your elected officials are well worth it.

The Louisiana CASA team is here to assist you at every step in the process. Please contact us with questions or feedback, or to share your stories, photos and results. Thank you very much for your commitment to best interest advocacy for children who have experienced abuse and neglect. We greatly appreciate you extending your efforts to advance the CASA mission.



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