

Guide to Effective Citizen Involvement and Legislative Advocacy



**COLORADO BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE
COUNCIL**

WWW.CBHC.ORG

FEBRUARY, 2011

Agenda



- Legislative 101
- Advocacy
- Communication & Outreach
- CBHC Day at the Capitol
- Resources

What is Advocacy?



Advocate

- (v) to speak or write in favor of; support or urge by argument
- (n) a person who speaks or writes in support or defense of a person, cause, etc.

Legislative 101



Understanding the Legislative Process



It is important to understand the legislative process.

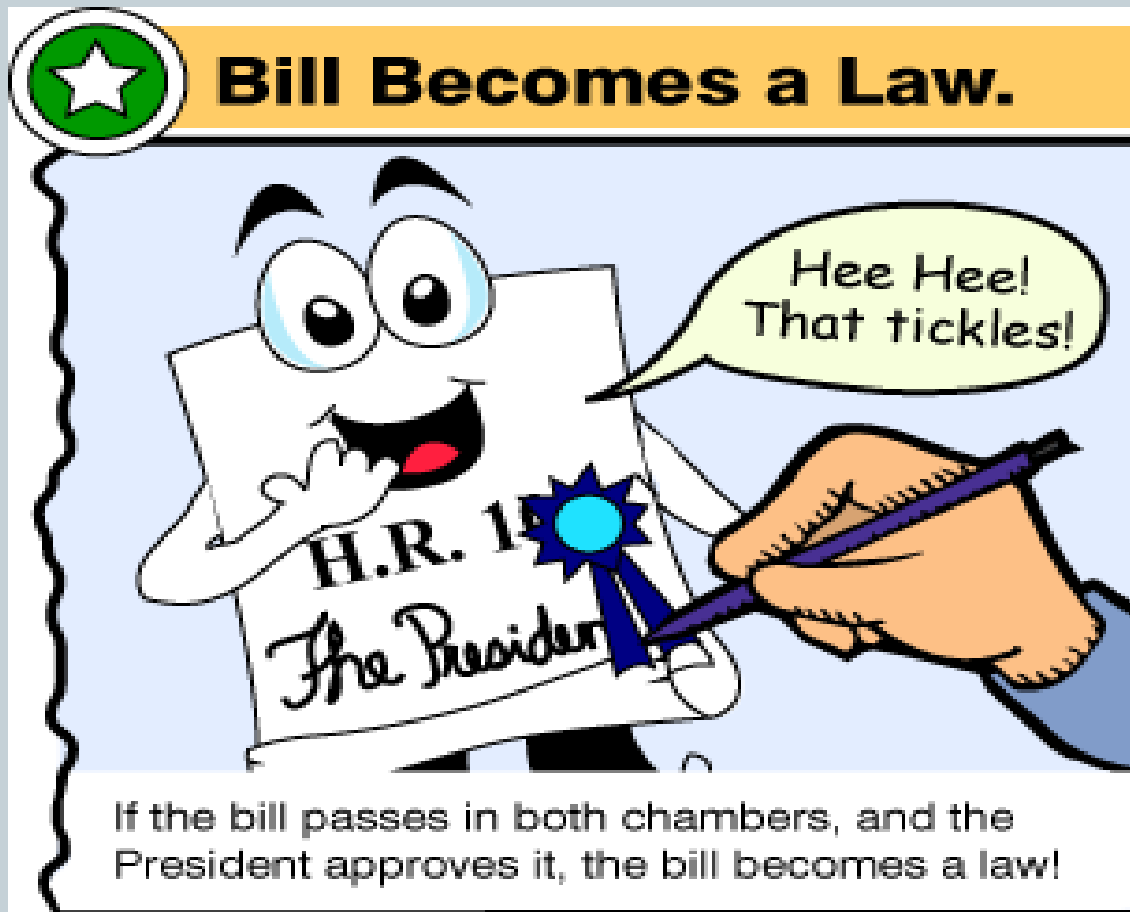
This will help you:

- **Understand where policymakers can affect change**
- **Know when it is important to communicate with your elected officials**
- **Develop reasonable expectations from the process**

How Does a Bill become Law?

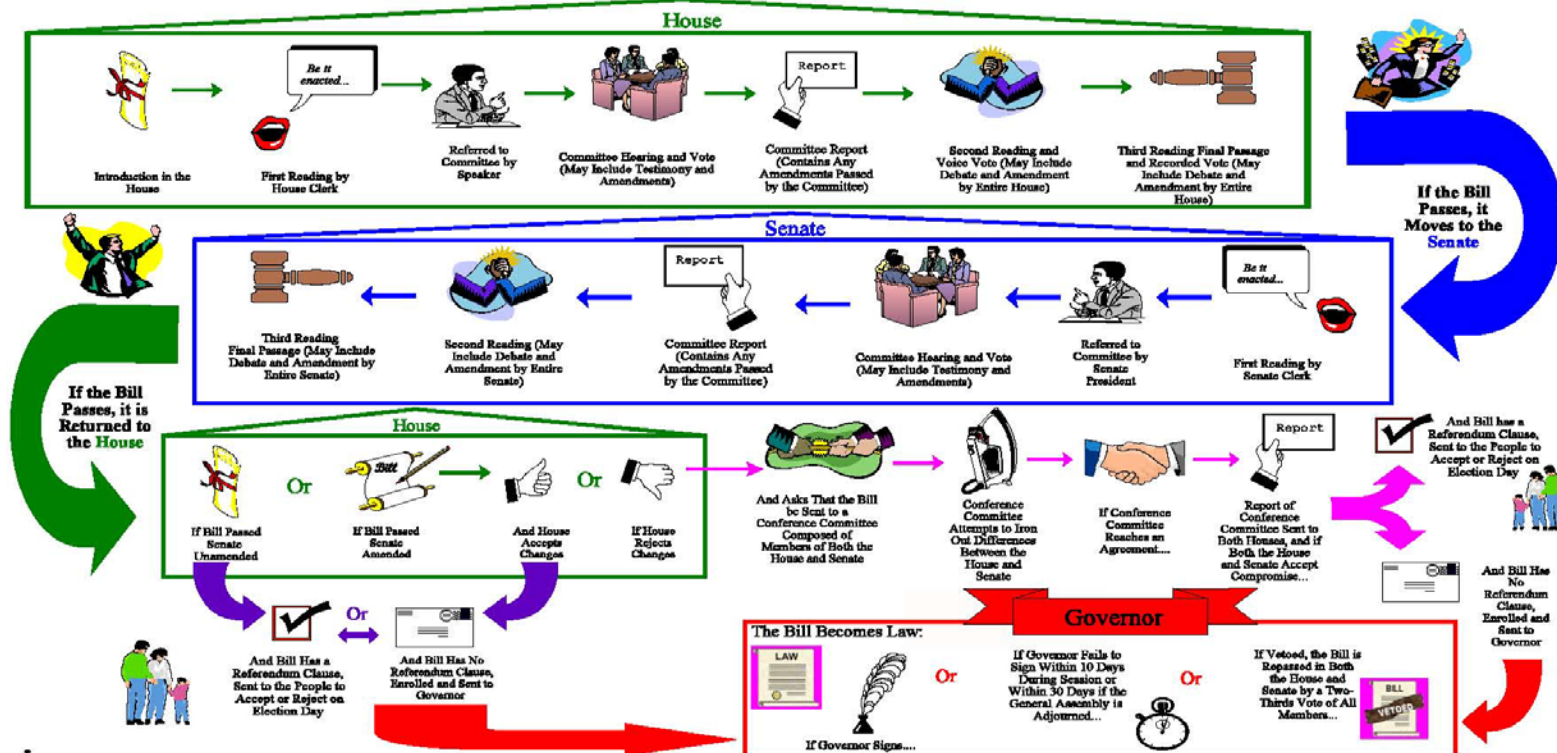


Like this?



How about this?

How a Bill Becomes Colorado Law*



Office of Legislative Legal Services, Colorado General Assembly, October 2001

* Assumes Bill is a House bill, a Senate Bill Follows a Similar Process Beginning in the Senate

Legislative 101



- Bill is introduced
- Assigned to appropriate committee(s)
- Public hearing & testimony
- If passes, moves to a floor vote
 - In Colorado it is voted on twice on the floor
- Crosses over to the other house
- Any disagreements between houses settled
- Governor signs or vetoes

Legislative 101 (cont.)



- **Legislature cannot exceed 120 days**
- **General Assembly**
 - House: 65 members
 - Senate: 35 members
- **Term limits**
 - House: 2 year terms up to 4 times
 - Senate: 4 year terms up to 2 times

Why Should I Advocate?



Why Should I Advocate?



- **YOU are an expert!!**
- **Our elected officials WORK FOR US!!**
- **The work you do is extremely important**
- **A phone call, email, or letter is all that it takes!**

Importance of Advocacy



Develop Support for MH & SA with Policymakers

- Educating local officials and legislators about the importance of behavioral health is the first step to ensuring continued support.

Protect and Increase MH & SA Funding

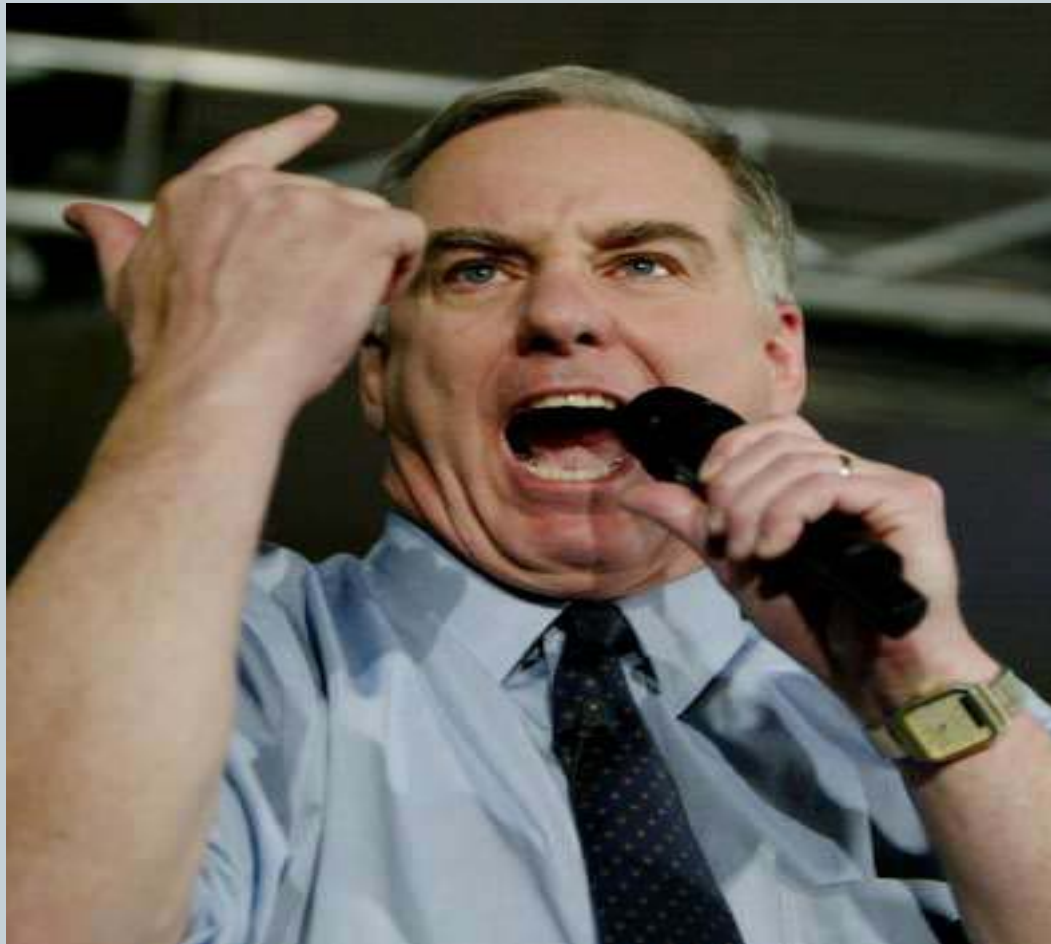
- Grassroots advocacy and effective communication with elected officials is crucial to ensuring behavioral health funding increases and policy objectives are achieved.

What your Elected Officials Can Do For You



- Sponsor legislation to help with a specific issue facing the mental health system
- Offer amendments to current legislation to accommodate specific needs
- Sponsor resolutions/proclamations recognizing the importance of mental health and substance abuse treatment
- Offer and support funding increases

What Should I Do?



What to Do



- Contact your elected officials
- Set up a site visit
- Be succinct, honest & respectful
- Have an ask
- Tell your personal story
- Use data, maps, & images
- Testify at a legislative hearing

Preparation Prior to Making Contact



Do your homework, and learn about the elected officials you will be meeting:

- Do they support and value mental health and substance abuse treatment
- What are their key issues/interests
- Have they sponsored/supported any behavioral health initiatives in the past

Making Contact



Depending on the reason for making contact, you should choose the most effective method of communication:

- In-person
- Email
- Phone
- Letter/fax

During the Meeting



- Address the elected official by their title (Representative/Senator)
- Be well informed--know what issues you would like to discuss beforehand
- Be concise and respectful of their time
- Provide written information about your issues and leave them materials about your organization
- Follow-up from your meeting with a thank you note, and any additional information that may have been requested during the meeting.

Meeting With Staff



Staff are a key part of the process!

- Don't decline a meeting with staff in lieu of meeting with the elected official
- Elected officials make decisions on numerous issues, so often rely on their staff to be the subject-matter experts

Opportunities for Ongoing Communication



- Invite staff and elected officials to visit your programs/facilities
- Attend their in-district town hall meetings
- Thank them for supporting specific pieces of legislation/funding increases
- Keep them informed of issues affecting your organization

In-Session Communication



The strength of our grassroots advocacy is highly dependent on your connection to your state-level elected officials.

Strategic communication with policymakers will ensure continued support for community-based mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Legislative Hearing Testimony



- Double check hearing date/time/location
- Listen online or attend a prior hearing
- Sign in
- Follow protocol
- Be prepared for questions
- Provide written statement, but don't read verbatim
- If you cannot attend in person, submit written testimony

Things to Remember



Key to Success—Educate Policymakers about the Importance of Community Behavioral Health



Identify opportunities to continue to **educate** about the importance of community-based behavioral health

- Get on the legislative agenda
 - Mental health and substance abuse treatment providers compete with many other “well-funded” entities and organizations for limited resources
 - Sometimes it takes a crisis or a powerful advocates to attract attention to behavioral health issues
- To be successful:
 - Focus on personal communication
 - Include well developed and tailored messages

Your Role in the Process



- CBHC cannot effectively carry the message to policymakers without you
- Constituents and community members are the most effective messengers
- Building relationships can have a long-term benefit to help secure resources and additional supports in the future

Developing Effective Messages



- Remember you are an expert!
- What does the policymaker care about? (What do you have in common?)
- Why should the policymaker support you?
- What will you ask the policymaker to do?
- Give them a reason to support you!

The Current Fiscal Situation and Opportunities



- **Remember:**
 - The current economic situation will be on the mind of the elected official you are meeting
 - Any new spending programs will have little chance of getting much traction as a result of the economic crisis
 - Long-term cost savings do not carry much weight with legislators that need to find immediate cost savings

The Big Picture



Cultivating and nurturing relationships with elected officials and staff is never a waste of time.

Even people who initially appear to have little interest in behavioral health, can end up being a huge asset in the future.

The Big Picture



Term limits have created a dynamic in Colorado where we have many newly elected officials each election cycle.

These newly elected officials generally have a steep learning curve to understand the legislative process, as well as the impact of their votes on the local community.

CBHC Day at the Capitol



Importance of CBHC Day at the Capitol



- In order to demonstrate the strength of Colorado's community-based mental health system, we must:
 - have a large presence
 - utilize all opportunities to educate policymakers
 - develop a clear message and effective messengers
 - communicate the importance of behavioral health to the larger healthcare system of the state
 - communicate that resources directed to behavioral health are dollars well spent

Goals of CBHC Day at the Capitol



- **Educate** policymakers
- Build and nurture support for behavioral health issues
- Demonstrate the commitment of the community
- Have fun!!!!

CBHC Day at the Capitol



- 7:30a-8:45a - Breakfast and welcoming remarks
 - State Capitol—2nd Floor – Old Supreme Court Chambers
- 9:00a - Observe House and Senate Floor Work
- 10:00a -12p - Meet with elected officials/observe committee work
- Noon - Lunch on own/or with elected officials
- 1:30p - Healthcare Reform and Closing Remarks
 - First Baptist Church of Denver, 1373 Grant St., Miller Hall
(southwest corner of 14th & Grant)
- 2:00p – Committee Hearings

Logistics



- On Feb 10, check in will be at the State Capitol – 2nd Floor, Old Supreme Court Chambers
 - Registered participants will receive a packet and nametag at that time
- You should have received an email with an agenda for the day and a map of local parking lots that are near the Capitol
- Start setting up meetings with your elected officials
- If you have any questions before Feb. 10, please contact:
 - Terri Hurst—303-832-7594 xt. 11 or thurst@cbhc.org
 - Brian Turner—303-832-7594 xt. 10 or bturner@cbhc.org

Resources



The Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council

- Member Resources – Public Policy
- **www.cbhc.org**

Colorado General Assembly

- **www.leg.state.co.us**

Questions? Comments? Concerns?



**Thank you and we'll see you
February 10th!!!!**