



**Cerebral Palsy Associations
of New York State**

Real people. Realizing potential.

Your Guide to
ADVOCACY



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State is to advocate and provide direct services with and for **individuals with** cerebral palsy and other **significant disabilities**, and their families, throughout New York State in order to promote lifelong opportunities and choices for independence, inclusion and enhanced quality of life.

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INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities, families and friends have been the catalyst for change in the fight to ensure that people with disabilities are given opportunities to be active participants in their communities. We at Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State (CP of NYS) have worked very hard to educate our elected officials and other community leaders about the need to provide the proper supports and services for people with disabilities. We have research and decades of experience in providing those supports and services, but you live the reality every day. Your voices are much more powerful than ours. Your personal stories and your experiences can be effective tools of persuasion.



Susan Constantino
President & CEO

This booklet is intended to be a guide to help you understand how to be a more effective advocate. You will find information about registering to vote, voting and how to make the most of your meetings with elected officials, educators, bureaucrats, and others who must come to understand the needs of people with disabilities. The basic techniques and guidelines in this booklet will help you to better prepare for meetings with those who can help you access the appropriate supports and services that will open up opportunities for all people. The information in this booklet can help you be more effective and focused in advocating for yourself, your family members, friends, people you support, or for larger issues that affect thousands of New Yorkers across the state. You know best what is needed from government, school officials, and community leaders to make fully inclusive lives in their community a reality for citizens with disabilities.

I encourage you to use the information in this publication to help you be a stronger advocate for all people with disabilities. You can stay up-to-date and learn more about how others in New York State are affecting change for the better by connecting with family members, volunteers and staff at nyfamilyrights.org or cpofnys.org.

REGISTER TO VOTE AND VOTE!

“Nobody will ever deprive the American people of the right to vote except the American people themselves and the only way they could do this is by not voting.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt
Governor of New York & 32nd President of the United States

Registering to vote and voting for candidates that will protect and establish policies to benefit people with disabilities is more critical today than ever before. Only by becoming a voting bloc, that has the attention of politicians, will public policy and funding truly support community inclusion and independence for people with disabilities. Therefore, it is incumbent on every one of us to register to vote and vote in every election and for every position.

Qualifications to Register to Vote

- Be a United States citizen;
- Be 18 years old by December 31 of the year in which you file the form (note: you must be 18 years old by the date of the general, primary or other election in which you want to vote);
- Live at your present address at least 30 days before an election;
- Not be in prison or on parole for a felony conviction;
- Not be adjudged mentally incompetent by a court; and
- Not claim the right to vote elsewhere.

How and Where to Register to Vote

- You can register in person at your county board of elections or at the New York State Board of Elections (see link below).

<http://www.elections.ny.gov/MeetingVoterAccessNeeds.html>

- You may also submit your voter application form at the Department of Motor Vehicles, either in person or on their web site if you already have DMV-issued identification.
- You can call the League of Women Voters hotline (**1-800-FOR-VOTE**) to request a voter application, or go to the link below.

<http://lww.org/get-involved/local-leagues/new-york>

- You must register in advance in order to be eligible to vote in primaries and the general election. Please refer to deadlines for the current year on the New York State Board of Elections website.

*<http://www.elections.ny.gov/VotingRegister.html>
<http://www.elections.ny.gov/VotingDeadlines.html>*

Let us know if you have any issues or concerns with voting accessibility. Email or call us at:

AffiliateServices@cpofnys.org ~ 518.436.0178



Governor Andrew M. Cuomo

www.governor.ny.gov

518.474.8390

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo

Governor of New York State

NYS State Capitol Building

Albany, NY 12224

New York State Senate

www.nysenate.gov

Information: 518.455.2800

New York State Assembly

www.assembly.ny.gov

Public Information: 518.455.4218

United States Congress

Main Switchboard: 202.224.3121

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Charles E. Schumer

United States Senator

202.224.6542

Honorable Kirsten E. Gillibrand

United States Senator

202.224.4451

Find Your Local Representative

www.nyfamilyrights.org/advocate/contact-influencers/

HOW A **BILL** BECOMES A NYS **LAW**

1. **Identifying the bill.** A legislator gets an idea for a bill from constituents, organized groups, or based on a local or statewide need. The legislator then decides whether or not to “sponsor” the bill. Bills can create new laws as well as repeal or amend existing laws.
2. **Writing the bill.** After deciding to sponsor a bill, the legislator has a bill drafting specialist write the idea in legal language. The bill is then “introduced” (made public), assigned a number, and “printed,” or made available on legislative websites.
3. **Reviewing the bill.** The bill is then sent to the appropriate committee for review. After review, if the majority of committee members support the bill, it is either referred to another committee for more review or “reported to the floor” where it must “age” for three days before it can be taken up for a vote. If the bill is not approved by the committee, it remains and is said to have “died in committee.”
4. **Funding the bill.** If the bill includes any funding requirements, it must also be reviewed by the fiscal committee in each House (Senate Finance Committee or Assembly Ways and Means Committee) before it can go to the floor for a final vote. These committees look at what funding will be required if the bill is enacted.
5. **Voting on the bill.** On the floor of either the Senate or the Assembly, the bill’s sponsor may explain and/or defend the bill. This debate usually can’t take place until three days after the bill has left the committee (exceptions include when the Governor provides a “Message of Necessity”). A vote on the bill is then taken and, if it passed, it is sent to the other House where it must go through the same process.
6. **Making the bill a law.** If both the Senate and Assembly pass the bill, it goes to the Governor who can either sign it into law or veto it. If the Governor vetoes a bill, it can still become law if two-thirds of both Houses vote to override the veto.

THE *DO's* OF SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

Making Contact

1. **Remember that time is precious.** All visits, letters, calls, etc., to your lawmaker should be “short and sweet.” Get to the point and stay focused on the issue.
2. If you are discussing a particular piece of legislation, **include the bill number and/or name of the legislation** or regulation in all communication.
3. **Include your name, address, email address, and phone number (home and office) on all communications.** This allows your lawmaker and staff to contact you for appropriate follow-up and it also reminds the lawmaker that you are their constituent.
4. **Remember that the lawmaker’s staff is as important to you as the lawmaker.** Staff are often the people who prepare the issue summary, including a vote recommendation, for the lawmaker.
5. **Tell your story**, or the story of a family member, person you support and what your/their life is like, how it affects you and your family, the challenges faced and the supports and services necessary to live as independently as possible (keep to 2-3 minutes or less). If you’re a family member, bring a picture of your son, daughter, sibling, etc. who receives services, it is always helpful for staff/legislators to remember your story.
6. **Get up-to-date information** on what the issues are and who you should seek to meet with from **NYfamilyrights.org** or **cpofnys.org**.

Following-Up

1. **Always follow up** a contact with letters, calls, etc. Make a commitment to the issue.
2. The number of people who contact a legislator on each issue is crucial – **strength in numbers can win the day**. This is true for letters, faxes, emails, phone calls, office visits, financial support, etc. Many issues are decided on the volume of communications received.
3. **Invest 30 minutes to contact** (by letter, phone, email, office visit, etc.) **an elected office** several times each year. This makes you more active than 99.9% of all citizens and therefore 99.9% more effective.
4. **Write a thank you note** to the lawmaker no matter what the outcome of your issue.

THE ***DON'Ts*** OF SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

While it is important to know what to do when advocating, it is just as important to know what not to do. Below are some communication gaffes to avoid.

1. **Do not confuse the issues.** Two or three issues are as much as you should cover in one contact.
2. **Do not use jargon.** Your lawmaker may have little or no knowledge of your issue or its jargon. Use your issue to educate your lawmaker. Always spell out acronyms.
3. **Do not fade away.** When contacting a lawmaker, persistence pays off.
4. **Do not say “my agency said so.”** Your lawmaker responds to you, the voter, not organizations.
5. **Do not forget the importance of a District visit.** Use “at home” visits, either in their District office or to show your representative supports and services, as an effective way to communicate with your lawmaker.



**Face-to-face
contacts are
important.**

PLAN FOR A *SUCCESSFUL* ON-SITE *VISIT* WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

A personal meeting with your legislator is one of the most effective forms of advocacy. In a face-to-face meeting, you have an opportunity to educate the elected official about the issue and tell your story. Personal stories are the most important. Below are some guidelines for conducting a successful visit.

1. **Make an appointment.** Call the legislator's office and ask for the scheduler in order to schedule an appointment. State that you are a constituent and your reason for meeting. (Check your address to verify that you are a constituent of the lawmaker you are visiting.)
2. **Do your homework.** Create an outline or script to use when talking to the legislator. This approach assures that a clear and concise message is presented. It is more productive to meet in small, representative groups of four to five people to effectively present a complete picture of the issue. If the meeting is a large group, designate a spokesperson.
3. **Get up-to-date information** on what the issues are and who you should seek to meet with from NYfamilyrights.org or cpofnys.org.
4. **Briefly tell your story.** Explain how disability affects your life, the life of your family, your work, the challenges faced and the supports and services necessary to live as independently as possible (keep to 2-3 minutes or less). If you're a family member, bring a picture of your son, daughter, sibling, etc. who receives services, it is always helpful for staff/legislators to remember your story.
5. **Follow-up.** Keep the lines of communication open by sending a "thank you" letter. Continue to communicate (via letters, faxes, emails) with the legislator and staff regarding your issue.



CP of NYS *Affiliates*

Able2

P.O. Box 1554
Elmira, NY 14902
(607) 734-7107

AccessCNY

1603 Court Street
Syracuse, NY 13208
(315) 455-7591

ADAPT Community Network

80 Maiden Lane, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10038-4811
(212) 683-6700

Aspire of WNY

2356 North Forest Road
Getzville, NY 14068
(716) 505-5500

Center for Disability Services

314 South Manning Blvd.
Albany, NY 12208
(518) 437-5700

CP Assn. of the North Country

4 Commerce Lane
Canton, NY 13617
(315) 386-1156

Cerebral Palsy of Long Island

380 Washington Avenue
Roosevelt, NY 11575
(516) 378-2000

Cerebral Palsy of Ulster County

P.O. Box 1488
Kingston, NY 12402
(845) 336-7235

Cerebral Palsy of Westchester

1186 King Street
Rye Brook, NY 10573
(914) 937-3800

CP Rochester

3399 Winton Road South
Rochester, NY 14623
(585) 334-6000

E. John Gavras Center

182 North Street
Auburn, NY 13021
(315) 255-2746

Empower

9812 Lockport Road
Niagara Falls, NY 14304
(716) 297-0798

Franziska Racker Centers

3226 Wilkins Road
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 272-5891

HCA of Southern NY

18 Broad Street
Johnson City, NY 13790
(607) 798-7117

Happiness House

731 Pre-Emption Road
Geneva, NY 14456
(315) 789-6828

Hudson Valley Cerebral Palsy Association

40 Jon Barrett Road
Patterson, NY 12563
(845) 878-9078

Inspire

2 Fletcher Street
Goshen, NY 10924
(845) 294-8806

Jawonio Inc

260 North Little Tor Road
New City, NY 10956
(845) 708-2000

Prospect Center at CFDS

133 Aviation Road
Queensbury, NY 12804
(518) 798-0170

Queens Centers for Progress

81-15 164th Street
Jamaica, NY 11432
(718) 380-3000

The Center for Discovery

Box 840, Benmosche Road
Harris, NY 12742
(845) 707-8888

UCP of Long Island

250 Marcus Boulevard
Hauppauge, NY 11788-2018
(631) 232-0011

Upstate Cerebral Palsy

1020 Mary Street
Utica, NY 13501
(315) 724-6907

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Central Office and Metro Services Cerebral Palsy Assns. of NYS

330 West 34th Street
New York, NY 10001
(212) 947-5770

Affiliate Services Office Cerebral Palsy Assns. of NYS

3 Cedar Street Extension,
Suite 2
Cohoes, NY 12047
(518) 436-0178

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