Connecting to Legislative Issues of Interest to Counselors

Daniel R. Cruikshanks Ph.D., LPCC-S
Stephanie T. Burns M.Ed., LPC
www.statelicensedcounseloradvocate.org
Goal

- Are you interested in making a difference to the field of counseling, but you're just not sure where to begin or what to do?

- This presentation will teach you how to stay current on issues affecting professional counselors in school and mental health settings and utilize the tools provided by the ACA and the ASCA to become a highly effective advocate for the field of counseling.
Objectives

Learn to navigate the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) websites to stay current on legislative issues important to counselors.

Recognize the importance of staying current with legislative updates provided by ACA and ASCA.

Utilize the tools provided by ACA and ASCA effectively to take action to advocate for the counseling profession.
Counselors have made tremendous strides during the past 30 years for school and mental health counseling.

Nevertheless, there continues to be a great deal of advocacy work that needs to be done, and our field depends on the grassroots efforts of our members.

It is up to “Us” to move the field forward, and so it is imperative that each of us become highly effective counselor advocates.
Background

➢ The problem is that we are all very busy and in this increasingly complex legislative system, it is difficult to stay abreast of the issues and how we can best make a difference.

➢ Fortunately, your professional associations including the ACA, the ASCA, and Chi Sigma Iota, each have been working to make this effort easier.

➢ These organizations are providing resources and tools to assist us in staying current, in advocacy training and education, and in taking effective action.
With a few minutes of effort, we can become informed of hot issues affecting our field today and get instructions on what to do to take action.

When each of us takes a few moments to work together toward a common goal, all professional counselors and those they serve benefit.
Conclusions

- Advocating for the profession of counseling is the responsibility of all counselors.

- With the resources provided by statelicensedcounseloradvocate.org, the ACA, the ASCA, and other national and state counseling associations, busy counseling professionals can be effective advocates in minimal amounts of time.
To write congress about a counseling issue, first visit the ACA’s website at http://www.counseling.org

Next, click the words “Public Policy” at the top of the page.
Once on the “Public Policy” webpage, you can explore the following areas:

- **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE** (news on counseling legislation for school and mental health counselors)

- **CURRENT ISSUES** (high priority federal policy issues)

- **HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CONGRESS** (lessons from recent research)
Public Policy Webpage

➢ TAKE ACTION! (call to action),

➢ RESOURCES & REPORTS (in-depth reports and background information on legislative issues)

➢ LINKS (policy links)
Take Action Webpage

- Clicking the link “Take Action” allows the user to both sign up for the ACA Government Relations Listserv and provides links to write or call congress about current legislation.
In the last step, you will first be offered information about a specific legislative letter that you can write.
At the bottom of the page, you can actually compose an e-mail or printed letter to your congress member.

Even though you will be offered a template to use to construct your letter, please remember that your personal story as a counselor dealing with this issue or writing about the experiences of your clients makes the biggest impact.
Please visit the statelicensedcounseloradvocate.org website for the PowerPoint “Making an Impact when Communicating with Legislators by Mail and E-mail” to learn how to incorporate narratives into your advocacy letters to provide meaning and urgency to the legislation under consideration.

http://www.statelicensedcounseloradvocate.org/advocacy-resources.html
Methods – ASCA Website

➢ The ASCA website (www.schoolcounselor.org) helps individuals to build their knowledge of legislative issues. First, click on the “School Counselors & Members” menu.
Next, you will want to click on the “Legislative Affairs” link to receive critical points of information related to education.
The “Legislative Affairs Page” contains information about loan forgiveness, professional alliances and legislative links for the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives, The White House, and the Library of Congress Thomas System.
A final feature of this resource allows interested individuals to sign up for a weekly e-mail update alerting them to education-related issues.

Members of the ASCA simply must update their membership record to reflect their desire to receive regular legislative updates.
Finally, the ASCA’s SCENE, Twitter, and Facebook accounts inform stakeholders about advocacy issues to build the capacity of all school counselors to effectively impact legislative policy.