

# Children's advocates can have strong voice

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The state legislative session is off and running, and lobbyists have already started crowding the halls of the Roundhouse, pushing their legislative demands.

Will children's advocates be prominent among them?

I've often observed that people who work with children don't naturally have the temperament of political activists.

The former tend to be gentle, soft-spoken and patient, while the latter are forceful, resolute and loud.

Can parents and teachers bridge the gap and become successful advocates in the political process? Of course — if we cultivate our inner squeaky wheel.

“The most important step to becoming an effective advocate is to pay attention,” said Bill Jordan, policy director for New Mexico Voices for Children, a nonpartisan advocacy organization that advocates for legislation supporting our state's children, families and communities.

“Watch what's happening. Ask questions. Get to know who your own legislators are. When you see things you don't like, or don't understand, or think might be important, call them up.”

The New Mexico Legislature Web site (<http://legis.state.nm.us>) identifies state representatives and senators by voter district or zip code. Reaching these legislators is easier, and more effective, than you might think.

“We're very fortunate in New Mexico to have a citizen's legislature,” Jordan added. “They are ordinary folks: teachers, doctors, lawyers, mailmen and everything else. They're not professional politicians.

“They can't be experts in every issue, so if someone who really knows about (an issue) calls them up, they're going to listen.”

And since New Mexico is such a sparsely populated state, “Our representatives represent fewer people. Our legislators are very accessible. We should take advantage of that.”

When you reach them, use the same skills you teach your children: Be polite.

Ask for what you need. Say thank you.

“If you like what you see, thank them,” Jordan said. “If you don't like what you see, tell them.”

To learn what's on the table for this year's 60-day session, visit New Mexico Voices' Web site, [www.nmvoices.org](http://www.nmvoices.org) and read their 2007 Legislative Priorities. This list provides useful background information on policy proposals they support or oppose, which would affect family health, safety, education and ability to move out of poverty.

Throughout the session, the site's bill tracker will follow the progress of this legislation.

Another easy way to stay informed is through New Mexico Voices' *Monday Minute*, a free weekly e-mail newsletter with news about issues affecting families and announcements of upcoming events.

Subscribers also will receive Legislative Alerts during the session, with updates on relevant bills and requests to call elected officials about pending legislation.

Whether you speak out individually, or as part of a group of teachers and friends, your political voice will carry farther than you might think.

“It really does make a difference,” Jordan said. “Not a lot of people contact their legislators, so if they get half a dozen or 10 calls on an issue, they listen.”

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