

STARTER KIT

Many people would like to influence the public laws and public budgets that affect their lives, but just don't know how to get started. Here are a few easy steps to do just that.

1. Remember how government is organized:

To influence public policy – public laws, public budgets, government regulations – it helps to remember 7th grade social studies. In our system we have **THREE LEVELS** of government, and **THREE BRANCHES** of government.

➔ The three **LEVELS** of government are: Federal, State, and Local.

➔ The three **BRANCHES** of government are Legislative, Executive, and Judicial.

The three branches have different names at the different levels, but their functions are the same.

- The **Legislative branch** is called Congress (federal), Legislature (state), and Council (city/county). Its job is to pass laws or ordinances (the name for local laws).

- The **Executive branch** is headed by the President/Vice President (federal), Governor/Lt Governor (state), and Mayor/County Executive (local). Under them come all of the executive branch agencies – like the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS – federal), the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS – state), and the Department of Human Services (DHS – local). Its job is to carry out the laws; to do that job they issue the Regulations spelling out how a law is to be implemented.

- The **Judicial branch** is made up of the courts – federal, state, and local (sometimes called municipal). Its job is to interpret the laws.

As citizens, we can influence the actions of all three levels of government, and all three branches of government – to one degree or another.

2. Find the people who represent YOU:

It's easy to get the names and contact information for your elected officials at all three levels.

➔ To learn the names of your two U.S. Senators and one U.S. Representative, go to www.senate.gov, and www.house.gov. It offers to “Find Your Senators” and when their names pop up, they also give you contact information and links to their respective home page.

➔ To learn the names of your one state Senator and two state Representatives, go to www.leg.wa.gov, and right on the first page, enter your address under District Finder. The names and contact information for all three will pop up, along with links to their home pages.

➔ To learn the names of your County Councilmember, use Google: write in the name of your County, and click on Council (or Government), and then “Which District Is Mine.”

➔ To learn the names of your City Councilmembers, use Google: write in the name of your city, and click on information about your local government. Or --

➔ Get **THEY REPRESENT YOU** – a free pamphlet from the League of Women Voters.

3. Be part of a group:

It's hard to be an advocate working alone, but easy as a member of a group. The group's staff and active volunteers often do the time-consuming work and only ask that you speak up when your voice is needed. Plus they give you sample messages and good information.

Whatever your issue, and whatever level of energy you can commit to it, good advocates always remember that in contacting elected officials, it helps to **remember your ABC's + P**.

Be **A**CCURATE; be **B**RIEF; be **C**COURTEOUS; and be **P**ERSISTENT.

You needn't be an expert - you just need to care, and not give up.