

Smoothing the Policy Bumps: Mitigation and Adjustment

So you just found that your state legislature has introduced language that will negatively impact your program. You are already implementing new federal policies, juggling local issues, and struggling with your budget. Now what? Changing legislation as it moves through the process cannot always be done, but do know that there are steps you can take to help educate legislators to alter language or table a bill for another year. SNA State Policy is here to assist and provide guidance on any of the steps below.

- Identify who the author of the legislation as well as the Chairs of the associated committees. Also discover if there is a companion bill if your legislature is bi-cameral.
- Draft a letter that includes the salient points: who you are and what you represent, specifics of how the legislation will negatively impact your program, and if possible, options for amending the legislation.
 - Offer to provide testimony or a written statement during a committee hearing.
- If possible, try to frame the letter in such a way as to praise the goal of the legislation. We all want to feed hungry children, but some ways of getting there are not feasible
- Money. Lack of funds is the number one reason why SNA affiliates struggle with certain state and local policies. In a time of compressed budgets, it is difficult to ask for additional funds, but it is helpful to explain how implementing a new policy will negatively impact your budget and as well as other nutritional programs. Be specific and “show your work” using charts and graphs.
- Provide contact information in case there are questions and ask to be kept up to date on the bill’s movements.
 - Enlist partner organizations and other groups to also reach out on the issue. There is safety in numbers!
- Invite the representatives for a cafeteria visit or to participate in another nutrition program. This is often one of the best ways to illustrate the benefits of the program – your best spokesperson is a child’s smile!

There are a wide variety of scenarios that can happen during the legislative calendar. Some bills pass very quickly and others fade away in committee with minimal impact. When the legislation being considered is one you are proactively involved in, passage is a good thing. But when you are forced into a reactive response, here are three likely scenarios.

The bill has been tabled for the year! How do you respond?

Send thank you letters to the key allies and ask them if you can assist in working on a bill for the next legislative session. If the goal of the former bill was a step in the right direction, work with the author to make them an advocate for school nutrition programs. If the bill would have negatively impact you, ask if you can meet to discuss changes or alternate language and be ready with your data. Obviously, such a meeting is not likely to occur if the stated goal was anti-school nutrition programs, but attempting to reach out does you no harm and might start a dialogue. If the intention is to

reintroduce the legislation, this allows you time to better prepare a response. Do note that many legislators will continue to introduce legislation about which they are passionate!

The bill was passed without changes! Now what?

Many times, a bill will move so quickly that no one has a chance for input or legislators will move a bill forward despite additional thoughts or information. Don't panic! Some things can be addressed before being implemented. Your best option for this avenue is to the state department that handles child nutrition issues. The state agency is more often than not responsible for setting up the structure for making a piece of legislation operational. As with the above, reach out to them regarding your concerns.

The bill was passed and now we need to implement! Is this the end?

SNA has witnessed our members performing small miracles every day. In cases where problematic policies are implemented, it is logical to continue to reach out to the state agencies and key legislators on additional language that can modify the new policy. Overtime, you will have a better grasp of the impact and can show concrete data about how a policy has affected budgets and students. Never be afraid to request additional funds, whether it's an additional few cents per meal or a pilot program fund to help offset some costs. By showing how any new program has impacted revenue can help make a stronger case for your position.



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