



North Carolina Alliance for Health  
Advocacy Guide and Workbook

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February 2011

The North Carolina Alliance for Health works to improve the health of North Carolinians by advocating for policies that promote wellness and reduce the impact of tobacco and obesity.



### **The Alliance**

The North Carolina Alliance for Health is an independent, statewide coalition of individuals, businesses and nonprofit organizations working to promote obesity and tobacco prevention policies before North Carolina's legislative and executive branches.

### **Training Goals**

The Alliance will share its approach to advocacy. Participants will understand the concept of advocacy and how it can affect legislation. Participants will learn how to develop and deliver policy messages. Participants will determine their role(s) in the advocacy planning process.

### **Contents**

<b>Civics 101 – North Carolina Government Overview and How Advocacy Affects the Legislative Process.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Communication is Key – Talking to Elected Officials....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Working with the Media.....</b>	<b>18</b>

# Civics 101 – North Carolina Government Overview and How Advocacy Affects the Legislative Process

## **Introduction to Government**

Under our federal system, government power and authority is separated into three levels. The most prominent of these governmental levels is the federal government. Most people possess at least a passing knowledge of the way the Congress, President and Supreme Court work together. The North Carolina state government system has a similar structure.

State legislatures are one of the integral pieces in the American government's structure. North Carolina's legislature, the General Assembly, is bicameral - that is it consists of both a House of Representatives and a Senate. Each is responsible for authorizing or eliminating taxes, appropriating revenues or creating laws.

The office of the North Carolina Governor mirrors the President of the United States in that the Governor represents the state to businesses and other agencies and oversees the execution of the laws created by the General Assembly. Though the Governor cannot introduce legislation, (s)he does have the power to veto legislation (s)he does not like. Veto power was only recently given to North Carolina's Governor through referendum in 1996. The Governor also possesses sweeping authority over the state bureaucracy and coffers.

## **The Legislative Branch**

The Legislative Branch consists of the North Carolina General Assembly. The General Assembly can be a confusing place, but there is a formal process that the business of lawmaking follows. Understanding the process and structure is the first step to influencing advocacy.

The North Carolina General Assembly is composed of two chambers – the Senate and the House of Representatives, each having its own elected leaders and committee structure. The General Assembly adopts the State Budget. Therefore, the General Assembly has a great deal of control over funds that are allocated for programs and projects that directly affect the programs you support.

### **The House of Representatives**

The House of Representatives has 120 elected members. House committees are appointed by the Speaker of the House, who is elected by and from the House membership. The current House Speaker is Rep. Thom Tillis.

### **The Senate**

The Senate is made up of 50 members elected from senatorial districts. The Lieutenant Governor serves as the President of the Senate. The current Lieutenant Governor is Walter Dalton. The Lieutenant Governor is elected separately from the Governor. The real authority in the Senate rests with the President Pro Tempore, who is elected by and from the Senate membership and is the leader of the majority party in this chamber. The “Pro Tem” is the most powerful Senator, appointing all committees and deciding which committees will debate each bill that is introduced. Senator Phil Berger currently serves as Senate President Pro Tem.

## **General Assembly Facts to Remember:**

...Each legislator, House and Senate, is elected in even numbered years for two-year terms. Their terms begin in odd numbered years.

...Being a member of the General Assembly is a “part-time” position.

...The General Assembly is required to meet for a long session in odd numbered years. This session begins in January and lasts until a few weeks after the budget is finished.

...In even numbered years, the General Assembly meets for a short session beginning in May, primarily to adjust the budget passed during the long session.

...During session, the Senate and House generally meet on Monday evenings, early afternoons Tuesday through Thursday and near the end of session, on Friday mornings. Committee meetings are held in the mornings and late afternoons.

## **General Assembly Committees**

The Committee system is very important because it is where the bulk of the General Assembly’s work is done. Committee members in the House are appointed by the Speaker and reflect the party membership in the House. In the Senate, the President Pro-Tempore appoints committee members of the majority party. The minority leader designates the minority party members. These assignments are made at the beginning of each session and remain the same through the session.

Every member of each chamber serves on either the Finance or Appropriations Committee. Most members serve on several committees. The Senate limits the number of committees on which members can serve to 12, but the House does not limit committee assignments.

Daily sessions of the General Assembly are arranged so committee meetings are held on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings. Occasional committee meetings happen in the afternoons before session and rarely, committee meetings are held after session into the evening.

Once a bill has been introduced, it must be assigned to a committee. The Speaker of the House makes committee assignments in the House with input from the Rules Committee Chair. In the Senate, committee assignments are made by the Chairman of the Rules Committee with input from the Senate President Pro Tem. In the current House, Rep. LaRoque and Moore are the Rules Co-Chairs. In the Senate, Senator Tom Apodaca is the Rules Chair. A bill’s committee assignment is important because the committee assignment can have an impact on whether the bill is voted out of committee favorably or is killed in committee.

After the bill is assigned to a committee, the committee may report the bill out of committee favorably, report the bill out favorably with amendments, recommend a committee substitute, or recommend against the bill. If the bill is voted down in committee, it dies in committee and does not receive further consideration.

In most committees, the legislator who introduces a bill explains its provisions and committee members may ask questions for clarification. Interested individuals from the public, advocacy organizations, or lobbyists may speak before the committee to express their support or opposition. Committee chairs have control over who may speak and for how long. Committee meetings are open to the public.

If a bill is reported favorably out of committee, it goes to the floor. The bill sponsor or committee chair is given the opportunity to explain the bill on the floor.

### **Committees for Advocates to Follow Appropriations**

All bills requiring the expenditure of state funds must go through the Appropriations Committee in both the House and Senate. The Appropriations Committee drafts the state's annual budget for approval by the full General Assembly.

The full committee is broken down into six subcommittees that handle various related issues within the larger budget package: Education, General Government, Health and Human Services, Justice and Public Safety, Natural and Economic Resources, and Transportation. Most, if not all, public health budget requests will fall in the Health and Human Services or the Education sections of the budget.

### **Finance**

All bills introduced in the legislature providing for bond issues, imposing or raising fees or other revenues payable to the state, its agencies, its licensing boards or any of its subdivisions; levying taxes or in any manner affecting the taxing power of the state must be referred to the Finance committee.

### **Other Committees to Follow Conference Committee**

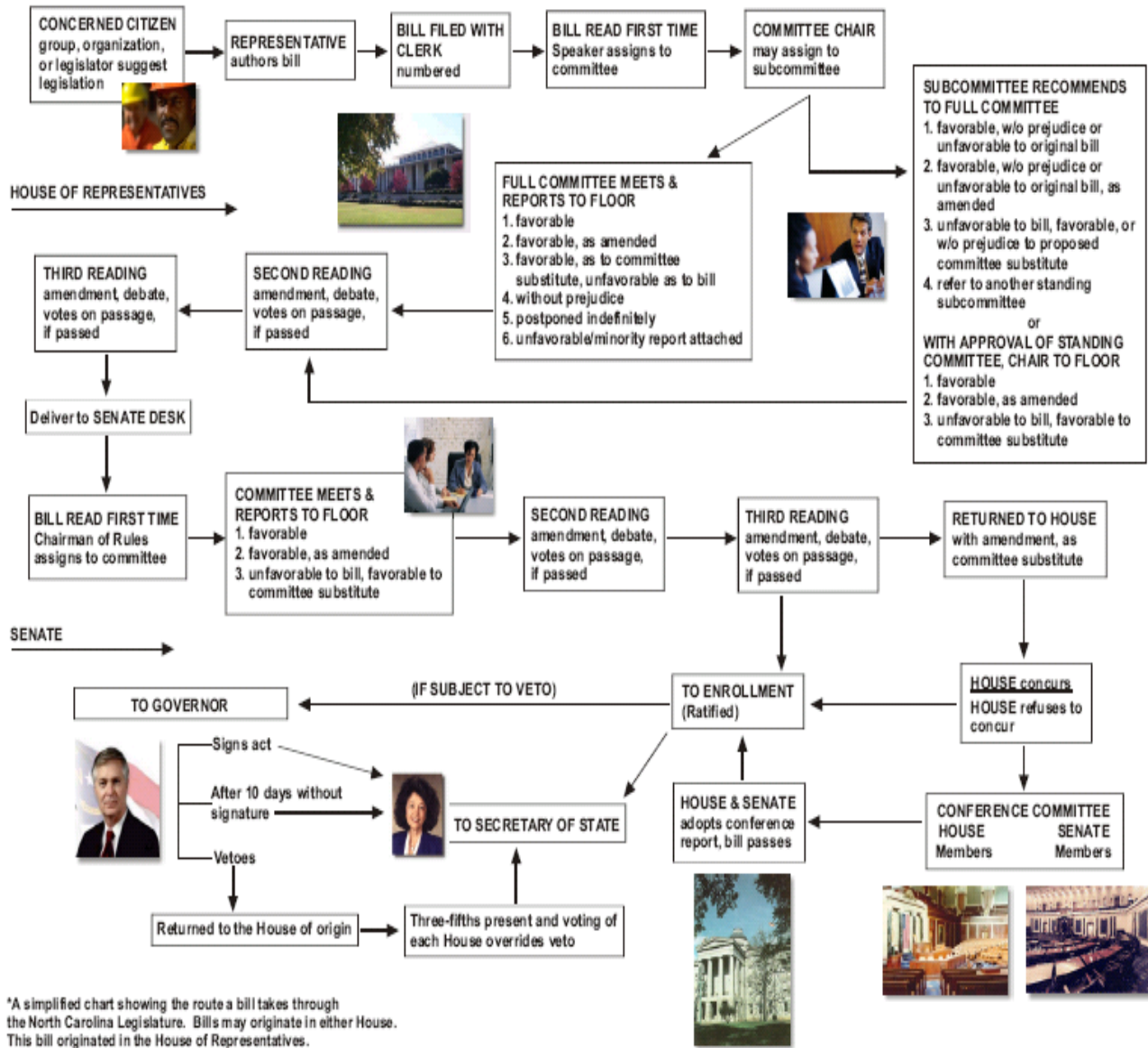
Once a bill has been passed in the House and Senate, a Conference Committee is appointed if there is a difference between the two chamber's versions of the bill. The committee is charged with working out the difference between the two bills and adopting wording for the final version of the bill. Both the House and Senate must vote to approve the Conference Committee report for the bill to be passed and sent to the Governor for his or her signature. Conference Committee reports cannot be amended.

**Study Committees**

These committees or commissions can operate between legislative sessions to carry on committee business and/or conduct related studies. They are provided with a specific charge at the end of a session to provide results by a certain time, usually during the next legislative session. The committees contain members of General Assembly as well as non-legislative members and are an extremely important part of the legislative process. During the short session every other year, only certain kinds of bills are introduced and voted upon. These bills must either contain a fiscal note (appropriation) or must have been proposed by a study committee.



# How An Idea Becomes A Law in North Carolina\*



## **How a Bill Becomes a Law: The Textbook Version**

The legislative process begins when ideas are generated that need to be addressed through legislation. Ideas can come from individual constituents, special interest groups, advocates, state agencies, legislators or the Governor's office.

### **Introduction**

A member of the General Assembly introduces a new piece of legislation in the form of a bill. A bill number is assigned by the Clerk's office. Numbers are assigned in order of introduction. Therefore, if a bill is the third bill introduced in the House, it will be HB 3 (House Bill number 3). The fourth bill introduced in the Senate will be SB 4 (Senate Bill number 4).

### **Reading**

Once a bill is introduced, its title is read for its first reading in the chamber in which it is introduced. Then it is assigned to a committee. House committee assignments are made by the Speaker. Senate committee assignments are made by the Rules Chair. This is an essential step because it can determine if a bill will pass or fail.

### **Committee Consideration and Report**

The bill may then be voted out of committee in its original form, favorably with amendments, with committee substitutes, or unfavorably. The bill may also be referred to another committee or to a subcommittee. The Committee process is critical because a bill can be changed considerably in committee or could die in committee.

### **Second Reading**

If passed out of committee and/or subcommittee, the bill is then brought to the floor of the chamber in which it was introduced. Amendments can be added on the floor. Once the bill is discussed and possibly amended, the bill comes to a vote to decide if the bill will pass its second reading. At this time, the bill may pass to its third reading or be voted down.

### **Third Reading**

The third reading allows for more debate and consideration of the bill before a vote is taken. Amendments can again be added. At this time, a final vote is made by the members to decide on the passage of the bill. Sometimes the third reading is held immediately after the second reading. At other times, the bill is heard later in the day or the next day.

**Passage #1**

If the bill passes the chamber in which it is introduced, the bill is then sent to the other chamber for consideration and the process begins again. The other chamber holds the first reading of the bill the day after it receives the original bill. It is then referred to committee in that chamber and the process starts over.

**Passage #2**

If the bill passes the second chamber in the same form as it was introduced, it is enrolled (becomes law). If it has been changed in anyway, the sponsoring house has a chance to concur with the changes. If the original chamber concurs, the bill is enrolled. If it does not concur, the two versions are sent to a conference committee.

**Conference Committee**

If the bill passed by the other chamber is a different version, a conference committee is assembled from members of both chambers. This gives the members an opportunity to work out differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill and adopt a Conference Committee report, the final wording of the legislation. The Speaker of the House appoints House members to a conference committee. The President Pro Tem of the Senate appoints Senate members.

**Conference Committee Report**

Both the House and Senate must vote on the final conference report. There is usually not much debate at this stage since differences were ironed out in committee. The Conference committee report cannot be amended and can only be voted up or down.

**Ratification**

Once the bill leaves the General Assembly, it must be ratified by the Governor. (S)he can ratify the bill or veto it. If vetoed, the bill returns to the General Assembly and the process begins again. If ratified, the bill becomes law.

**Enrollment**

After it becomes law, the bill is printed in its final form and then sent to the Secretary of State for inclusion in the Official Records and Printing.

## **How a Bill Becomes a Law: The Real Life Version**

While the textbook version is the framework in which law creation must happen, there are a few important aspects of the legislative process not included in textbooks that have significant effects on how a bill becomes a law.

### **Advocates**

There are thousands of registered special interest groups in North Carolina and hundreds of lobbyists that represent these interests. Thousands of bills are introduced every session and no legislator can read every bill. Legislators often turn to advocates for information on bills. Advocates patrol the halls, attend committee meetings, and in the past, bought meals for lawmakers, contributed to their campaigns, and even held fund-raisers for legislators, all to have more influence when certain bills come up or to convince a legislator to introduce or support a certain bill. While advocates and lobbyists still roam the halls and attend committee meetings, a law passed in 2006 bans lobbyists from buying legislators gifts like meals, contributing to campaigns, and holding fund-raisers for legislators. This law was an attempt to make the legislative process more open and fair.

### **Governor**

The Governor is the most powerful person in the NC political world. Those who would dispute that do not understand the breadth and depth of the power connected to the office and how that power can be used to affect the legislative process. To add to the Governor's power, voters gave the Governor veto power by approving a referendum in 1996. The office enables him/her to affect the careers and fortunes of every politician in the state and to affect the lives of NC citizens.

In order for the Governor to work his/her magic, (s)he must woo, cajole, threaten, and compromise with the 170 members of the General Assembly and (s)he has plenty of favors to dole out as incentives. For instance, (s)he runs the Department of Transportation, which means (s)he can exert influence, to some degree, over the placement of roads, bridges, paving contracts, transit money and an array of other transportation-related plums to win support. The Governor also controls the Parole Commission and the Commerce Department and can dole out favors to historical groups, cultural groups, and social programs.

### **Media**

The last major player left out of the textbook version is the media. Often, media attention paid to an issue determines how well it proceeds through the legislative process. The Capitol Press Corps has literally hundreds of issues and lawmakers vying for their attention.

## Numbers to Know

General Assembly Information (Connect to Any Legislator) (919) 733-4111  
House Principal Clerk\*.....(919) 733-7760  
Senate Principal Clerk\*.....(919) 733-7761

Legislative Building.....FAX..(919) 733-2599  
16 W Jones St  
Raleigh, NC 27601-2808

Legislative Office Building.....FAX..(919) 733-3113  
300 North Salisbury St  
Raleigh, NC 27601-2808

Institute of Government, Chapel Hill.....(919) 733-2484  
(follows legislative action and prints daily and weekly reports, also analyzes legislation)

Legislative Library.....(919) 733-7778  
(information about legislative history)

\*Available in the clerks' offices are the House or Senate Calendars, a list of Committees, Clerks, Secretaries, House and Senate districts, member lists with room assignments and General Assembly phone numbers, and House and Senate Rule Books. These items are also available at the General Assembly's website: <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us>

# Communication is Key – How to Talk to Elected Officials

## **Being an Effective Advocate**

Advocates are an integral part of government decision-making. This is a very healthy part of democracy because the American ideal is premised upon an open dialogue between the people and their elected officials. That is not to say that there are not some aspects of lobbying techniques that are not worthy of criticism; however, the NC Alliance for Health and other similar organizations and non-profits do not engage in the kind of activities that give lobbying a bad name. It is simply not necessary to spend a great deal of money to make an impact on the legislative process. Representatives, Senators and other elected officials crave the input of their constituents – they need it to stay in office.

The term “strength in numbers” directly describes the importance of grassroots lobbying. The goal of grassroots lobbying is to show legislators that there is a large and broad constituency of people throughout the state that care about the decisions made in the General Assembly, especially those that relate to the focus of your organization. Whether you make your interest known through writing, phone contact, personal contact, or other activities, such activities can make an organization or individual a viable political player.

## The Legislative Meeting

Your time with your elected officials is limited so you should have a strategy for an organized meeting with your legislator so that you will STAY ON MESSAGE – an easy way to remember this is to think of your time in terms of the Hook, Line and Sinker.

### The Hook

The Hook grabs your elected official's attention. It establishes you and the members of your group as constituents (people who vote in their district and keep the legislator in his or her position). It is important that all members of the group participate in The Hook and introduce themselves in the following way:

**Constituent A:** Hello Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am from \_\_\_\_\_ County.

If you or a member of your group has a personal relationship with this legislator, it is OK to remind the legislator of this relationship at this point.

**Constituent A:** Hello Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am from \_\_\_\_\_ County. We met at the Healthy Carolinians meeting at Festival Park last week.

Essentially, The Hook is the introduction process, but do not underestimate its importance.

### The Line

The Line gives you the opportunity to discuss the meat of your issue. You can provide both personal stories and factual information or statistics to show your legislator why your issue is important.

Here is an example:

**Constituent A:** Senator Basnight, we're here today to talk to you about HB 259, An Act to Eliminate Smoking in Worksites and Public Places. I'm not sure if you know this or not, but my Great Aunt Helga never smoked a day in her life, but after 25 years of working next to smokers at Miller's Seafood Restaurant down there in Nags Head, she was diagnosed with lung cancer last year. (This is the personal story-style line)

**Constituent B:** Senator Basnight, Great Aunt Helga is not the only person in a situation like that. There are thousands of North Carolinians who are exposed to secondhand smoke on the job every day. Our Healthy Carolinians partnership in Dare County is really concerned about this after the Surgeon General came out with his report last year that says there is no safe exposure to secondhand smoke. (This is the fact/statistic-style line)

Before entering a meeting, it is important to decide which constituent in your group has the most compelling story about your issue and who can best give information about facts and statistics. If you have a large group, it is not necessary for everyone in the group to speak. Remember, the time legislators may want or be able to give you is limited.

### **The Sinker**

The Sinker is the most important part of your meeting. The Sinker (seen below in *italics*) is your bottom line message or ask. It is essential that you get to this point in the meeting – it's why you're there. Though legislators may try to distract from this part of the meeting or end the meeting before you can make your ask, it is your job to politely make this ask and try to determine the legislator's position on your issue. It can be helpful at this point to tie your group's stories and statistics to what you're asking.

**Constituent C:** We're here today asking you to support HB 2 because we watch people like Aunt Helga and her family go through lung cancer every day. The Surgeon General says that secondhand smoke kills and HB 2 protects the public from this killer. *Can we count on your support for HB 2?*

### **Why Hook, Line and Sinker is Important**

It is important that in every meeting your group has with every legislator, the same method be used - this shows broad support and interest in the topics your group supports.

## **The Legislative Meeting: Interactive Exercise**

**The Issue:** The NC Alliance for Health has invited grassroots groups from around the state to their Advocacy Day at the General Assembly. They have decided to include increasing the cigarette tax by \$1 on their legislative agenda. A bill is going to be debated in House this week to increase the tax. Practice speaking with a moderate legislator that supported the passage of a smoke-free law in North Carolina, but you are unsure what their stance is on an increase in the cigarette tax.

**Legislator:**

**Constituents:**

**The Hook:**

**The Line:**

**The Sinker:**

**Leave Behind Materials:**

**Follow-Up Actions:**

## **Tips for a Successful Meeting:**

**Prepare for the meeting** – Know your issue and know your legislator. (What are their committees? What similar issues have they supported or opposed in the past? Do they have a personal connection to your issues? Who donates money to this legislator's campaign?)

**Practice for you meeting** – Even top lobbyists role play before their meetings. The goal is to anticipate questions you could receive and have answers prepared.

**Honesty is the best policy** – It's ok to say you don't know the answer to legislators' questions – the key is to find the answers and send them later. Your credibility and that of your organization is important.

**Be polite and gracious** – Even if the legislator/staff doesn't agree with you this time, he/she may in the future – you want to maintain your relationship.

**Leave written information** – Issues have more details than you can talk about in one meeting. It's ok to leave materials with your legislator.

**Don't let them make you too comfortable** – There's no need to accept offers of water, sodas, extra chairs from the rooms down the hall - these take up time!

**Stay on message** - Don't let legislators distract from your message with stories from home, questions about community members, long-winded diatribes about the last time they ran in to you and your family, etc. Be polite, but **STAY ON MESSAGE!**

**Get contact information** from whomever you meet with so you can follow up.

**Send a thank you note/email** to everyone with whom you met, including staff members.

# Working with the Media

## **The Media is a Tool**

The media serves several purposes when pushing an issue in the legislature. Primarily, it draws public and legislative attention to the issues most important to your group. What we see in the press is not always a result of simple happenstance. Getting your issues in the media takes work. It involves a similar level of organization as that required to plan and conduct a successful legislative meeting and issue campaign. You must cultivate relationships with your local media, plan messages you want heard by the media, and again, **STAY ON MESSAGE**. It is very important to remember that legislators read their hometown news daily and so if you receive media attention, you will likely receive legislative attention as well.

## **Letters to the Editor**

The opinion page of the paper and most websites is the most widely read section of the paper/website so if you can get a letter to the editor (LTE) published on your issue, you are sure to get the attention of both your legislator and the public.

Simply writing an LTE is not enough – it must be also printed or published before it is effective. Your letter is most likely to get printed if:

- It is written in response to articles about issues that pertain to your organization
- It is the appropriate length – read other letters before writing yours - the shorter and more to the point, the better
- It is written by an effective person. Consider: who is the best person to write the letter?

### **Group Exercise - Letter to the Editor Outline:**

Dear Editor:

I am writing in response \_\_\_\_\_

**[Letter Body]**

**[Bottom line message you want to share]**

Sincerely,

**[Who should write this letter?]**

### **Opinion Editorials**

Opinion editorials (Op-Eds) are also important media tools. Op-Eds are longer versions of letters to the editor that focus on a broad topic. For example, instead of simply responding to a specific, previously-published article that discusses a minute aspect of the secondhand smoke debate as we would in an LTE, in an Op-Ed, we would write our group's opinion for why North Carolina hasn't passed comprehensive anti-secondhand smoke legislation and include more relevant details. It is again important to read Op-Eds in your local paper before writing your own and to stay on message. Look for writing style, length and tone and write your Op-Ed accordingly.

### **Editorial Boards/Meetings with the Editor**

Newspapers like to print the opinions of their readers. As a result, smaller papers will often grant your group time to meet with the Editor. Larger papers offer time to meet with the Editorial Board. Schedule time to talk with the Editor/Editorial Board about your group's issues. Bring experts on your issue and town celebrities (especially if they have national attention) to support your positions. This will add weight to your argument and gain the attention of your Editor/Editorial Board. Just as you studied your legislator and tailored your message to suit their interests and experiences, explain your issue in a way that will interest the paper's readers (and therefore your Editor/Editorial Board). Once you have built a relationship with these press leaders, send a press release on your issue. It is likely that you will see an editorial written that mirrors your conversation and press release.

### Checklist for an Effective Press Release\*

- Is the release on your organization's letterhead?
- Is the release dated and marked for immediate release or held until a specific day and time?
- Is the contact person's name and phone number (day and evening) listed at the top of the release?
- Is the headline short and pithy?
- Is the copy double-spaced?
- Does the first paragraph explain who, what, why, when and where?
- Have you quoted key leaders in the second and third paragraphs? (Your organization should decide who to quote and you should clear all quotes used with the person quoted before using them)
- Have you listed the organization's name several times?
- Are all names, titles and organizations spelled correctly?
- Is each sheet marked with an abbreviated headline? (whole release should be no more than 2 pages – 1 is absolutely ok)
- Did you put "-30-" or "#####" at the end of the release to indicate the end? (Don't ask questions, it's just what you do)

\*Information from Midwest Academy "Organizing for Social Change: Midwest Academy Manual for Activists"

## Example Press Release



For Immediate Release

March 19, 2007  
Contact: Pam Seamans (919-867-5309)  
North Carolina Alliance for Health

### **Historic legislation to limit exposure to deadly secondhand smoke passes House Judiciary Committee**

**Durham** – Referring to North Carolina House Bill 259 that calls for smoke-free environments at work and in public settings, NC Alliance for Health executive director Pam Seamans commended Rep. Hugh Holliman (D-Davidson) for his dedication and commitment to protecting consumers and workers from deadly secondhand smoke. “The Alliance’s goal is to protect all of the workers in North Carolina from the health dangers of secondhand smoke and thanks to Representative Holliman, we now have a bill that is a catalyst to achieving this goal. We support Rep. Holliman with his historic action for wanting a stronger, healthier policy for all North Carolinians.”

The North Carolina Alliance for Health, an independent, statewide coalition of individuals, businesses and nonprofit organizations, advocates for health improvement policies in North Carolina. They support smoke-free worksites and public places and support House Bill 259. In addition, Seamans praised the House Judiciary 1 Committee members for their vote to take this important legislation to the House floor.

In releasing the statement, Seamans said, “While this bill does not protect every North Carolina worker, this bill will protect the vast majority of workers and is clearly a step in the right direction. Secondhand smoke is a serious public health threat and should be addressed as such.”

### **Historic legislation ... con't**

As this bill is written, it would ban smoking in all worksites and public places except in the following locations: private residences, retail or wholesale tobacco shops, tobacco manufacturing or processing facilities, designated guest rooms in lodging establishments, private clubs and for medical research uses. Seamans noted that currently in North Carolina only 76 percent of white-collar workers, 52 percent of blue-collar workers and 43 percent of food service workers currently benefit from voluntary smoke-free policies. "This bill will really move these numbers in the right direction. Think of the lives that will be saved."

According to the US Surgeon General, there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke is proven to cause lung cancer, heart disease, serious respiratory illnesses such as bronchitis, asthma, low birth weight and sudden infant death syndrome. It is responsible for tens of thousands of deaths in the United States each year.

"North Carolinians want smoke-free places to live and work," Seamans said citing a September 2006 Elon poll that showed some 86 percent of North Carolinians agree or strongly agree that employees in North Carolina should be able to work in a smoke-free environment. It also showed that 64.7 percent of the respondents support or strongly support a law in North Carolina that would not allow smoking in restaurants and bars.

"The Alliance believes no individual should have to breathe secondhand smoke and put their health at risk as a condition of employment. Everyone has the right to breathe clean air," emphasized Seamans.

####



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[www.ncallianceforhealth.org](http://www.ncallianceforhealth.org)

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