

# ASI Student Advocacy Toolkit



ASSOCIATED  
STUDENTS, INC.  
SACRAMENTO STATE

## **ASI STUDENT ADVOCACY WORKSHOP SERIES**



**Table of Contents**

Introduction.....1

**Local Level**

    What is Advocacy at the Local Level? .....2

    Who are the Key Players?.....2

        Counties .....2

        Cities .....3

    How can you Advocate at the Local Level? .....3

**California State University (CSU) Level**

    What is Advocacy at the CSU Level?.....4

    Who are the Key Players?.....4

    How can you Advocate at the CSU Level? .....5

        Campus Level .....5

        CSU Board of Trustees and the Chancellor.....6

**State Level**

    What is Advocacy at the State Level? .....7

    Who are the Key Players?.....7

    How can you Advocate at the State Level? .....8

**Federal Level**

    What is Advocacy at the Federal Level? .....9

    Who are the Key Players?.....9

    How can you Advocate at the Federal Level? .....10

Public Comment.....11

    Structure .....11

    Preparation .....11

Meeting with Those in Positions of Power.....12

    Individual.....12

    Group .....12

What to Do When Things go Wrong? .....13

Conclusion .....14

---

## **Introduction**

As students, we face many challenges while working towards getting our degrees. These challenges can range from those on our campus related to academics or policies of the CSU system, or challenges stemming from issues in our communities like homelessness, food insecurity, or policing. They can also exist at larger levels with issues like state and federal financial aid or policy relating to undocumented students. In any case, when working to solve these problems, student voices are essential.

To provide a personal example, in the CSU system today, 41.6% of our students struggle with food insecurity, and 10.9% have struggled with homelessness. In my four years of student government, I have had the privilege of advocating for many bills in the state legislature to address these issues, and with every single meeting, the most important part was the stories of the students I brought to the capital. I could list out those statistics above all day, but when a student would share how going hungry impacted their health, or how losing their housing caused them to almost drop out, those were the moments that legislators listened. No matter what the issue is, our student's voices must be at the center of an effort to solve it.

With that said, being a student advocate is not an easy task with work, school, and life already taking up so much of our time. On top of this, each institution you are advocating for change in has its own procedures, actors, and structure that determine how advocacy works. It is with these challenges in mind that we put together this tool kit, outlining some of the most common levels of advocacy for students and providing information about how they work and how to be an effective advocate at that level.

Your student government will always exist as a resource to support you in your advocacy, but unfortunately, student leaders cannot work on every issue at once. So, whether you are a student working on this issue independently, or a student government leader working to start an advocacy effort, it is our hope that this toolkit can assist.

- 2020-2021 Sacramento State ASI President, Noah Marty

## **Local Level Advocacy**

### **What is advocacy at the Local Level?**

Local government and the happenings in your local community will most likely have the greatest impact on your life of all these levels, outside of possibly the CSU. Local governments have control over addressing issues within the community like homelessness, food insecurity, parking, public safety, sustainability, and much more. Though the style and structure of local governments vary greatly from region to region, the function of running and overseeing a local area like a city or county is at the core of what they do.

Local-level advocacy is by its nature very personal. It features a lot of community engagement since issues can be very specific, like poorly maintained roads on a street, or larger in scale, like addressing lack of affordable childcare options or homelessness. Advocating for these issues can take the form of speaking during public comment at meetings, attending town halls and having discussions with your local elected official, forming groups or coalitions, and much more. A recent example of an incredibly well-organized local advocacy effort with San Francisco State's 2020 opposition to the application of a 25% tax on student parking. Their Associated Students organized a full campaign against the effort, including a collection of stories, and through it gained a significant amount of press coverage for their cause.

### **Who are the key players?**

#### **Counties**

At the local level, there are two main bodies, cities, and counties. In some situations, like Sacramento or Los Angeles, there is the City of Sacramento and the County of Sacramento, both with their own City Council and Board of Supervisors, respectfully. Each county is run by a Board of Supervisors, who represent different districts within the county. The Board of Supervisors is responsible for overseeing the administration of the county, setting priorities and policies, passing ordinances. This is where the similarities for each county end and each has differing power structures between offices below the Board of Supervisors and the powers of the Board of Supervisors themselves. Counties have various departments ranging from Health and Human Services to Education, each with staff dedicated to working on that issue. Since each county is organized differently, some have extremely formalized bureaucratic systems and others are far simpler, often due to a smaller population they serve. To learn more about your county, see if their website has an FAQ page, or find the contact information for your county supervisors office and reach out to them with any questions you may have.

## **Cities**

Cities are another local body and are governed by a City Council, a Mayor, and a City Manager. First is the City Council, which is made up of elected Councilmembers who are responsible for representing their district of the city. The City Council is responsible for overseeing the administration of a city, and depending on the local government, can act as the legislative and executive body for the city. This can include passing local ordinances, the budget for the city, creating policies and procedures for the city and its various departments, and more. The Mayor is another elected position that acts as the leader of the city. Depending on the local government, Mayors either have strong control over executive powers in the city or share those powers with the City Council. The last major office is the City Manager, who is usually appointed by the Mayor and is directly responsible for the administrative affairs of the city.

### **How can you advocate at the Local Level?**

Local advocacy is about your community. Due to the smaller number of people, local governments oversee (in most cases), your personal stories and experiences in the community carry a great deal of weight. Whether its departments or the governing bodies you are advocating to, their district sizes in most cases will be the smallest of all levels of government, so organizing a group of people around an issue could very likely be enough people to have a meaningful impact on an election, and therefore elected officials are more likely to listen.

Since local government's rules, procedures, culture, and structure vary so much from city to city or county to county, a great first step is gathering information about your local government to understand how it works. Some great ways to do this are researching on the county website, contacting your city council member or county supervisor's office and talking with their staff, or contacting a group or organization that is active in local government advocacy where you live.

Once you find out exactly how things work for your local government, you can send letters to the identified party to focus your advocacy on, speak during public comment at governing meetings, organize rallies or protests, call your elected representatives office and schedule a meeting to meet with their staff, or be creative and come up with your own advocacy methods.

The beauty of local advocacy is that the work is directly in your community, with the people who live right alongside you. If you are organizing an event, rally, or protest, you do not have to gather people from across the state or country.

## **California State University (CSU) Level Advocacy**

### **What is advocacy at the CSU Level?**

Whether it be at your home campus or the CSU Board of Trustees, advocating at the CSU level is where you can have the greatest immediate impact. On your campus, students like you make up the majority of the campus population, and your administration is there to serve you. Each CSU campus has a student government organization known as Associated Students, who are elected students that officially represent you. These organizations are composed of fellow students, and they want to help, so you should make sure to coordinate with them if there is a problem. At a higher level, the CSU Board of Trustees has two student trustees who are college students just like yourself, both with voting power. Whatever issue you are advocating for, the potential for direct impact within a short period is highest at the CSU level.

On our campuses, student advocacy is responsible for the creation of spaces like Food Pantries, Health Centers, Student Unions, Science Complexes, and policy changes like voting rights on important committees or changes within specific colleges or departments.

Advocacy at the CSU level could include serving on committees as a student representative, meeting with campus administration or college deans, organizing events on campus, contacting CSU Trustees, speaking during public comment at CSU Board of Trustees meetings, or scheduling a meeting with staff in the CSU Chancellor's Office. In recent years one of the most important advocacy efforts at the Board of Trustees has been advocating against tuition increases.

### **Who are the key players?**

At your university, the campus President is the most important player for campus decisions. The campus President is the public face of the university and runs the campus through their cabinet composed of various Vice Presidents. Think of the President as the CEO of the University, and in that role, they sign off on the budget, provide leadership to the campus community, and oversee all campus operations. The Vice Presidents at a University oversee departments and divisions on campus, such as Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, Administration, and Business Affairs to name a few. They are responsible for running the department and representing them on the President's Cabinet.

For Academic related issues, the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs are responsible for carrying out the academic priorities of the campus, in coordination with the university President. The Faculty Senate, which is comprised of faculty from across campus, is responsible for advising and creating academic policy. Additionally, each college has its own degree of autonomy over its own operations and policies, they are run by Deans and Associate Deans.

The CSU system is run by the CSU Board of Trustees and the Chancellor. The Board of Trustees is comprised of 25 members, including the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the Assembly, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Chancellor, along with two voting student trustees. The remaining members are appointed by the Governor. The CSU Board of Trustees oversees the CSU system and creates the policies, rules, and regulations universities must follow. The Chancellor also determines the cost of tuition, an important role that students should be aware of. Most recently Chancellor Castro was a strong proponent for not raising tuition, and student advocacy played a role in that. The Chancellor oversees the administration of the 23 CSU campuses and acts as the face of the CSU system both internally and externally.  
[KW1]

### **How can you advocate at the CSU Level?**

#### **Campus Level**

Since the scope of what the CSU can do is more limited than the government, you will want to determine if advocating at the CSU level is best. If your concern is anything related to academics, something happening on campus, something that can be done on campus, or the basic needs of students (which includes access to food, housing, necessary technology for learning, and mental health resources) then it likely can be advocated for within the CSU system.

If you are just getting started on advocating for your issue and need more information about what is currently being done, call or email the necessary administration. From here, you can ask for that information or request a meeting. Since this is your campus, it is easier to set up meetings and get direct information compared to other levels. You can also find student clubs or organizations on campus that are involved with the issue area you would like to advocate for.

Additionally, you can bring the issue to your ASI student government and we can help support you in getting in contact with the right people or developing what you want the campus to do. Your ASI has a variety of student representatives that work on specific issues like Academic Affairs or University Affairs, so don't be afraid to contact your ASI to figure out which elected student leader is in charge of the issue area you are interested in. Last, and certainly not least, you can join committees that have to do with the areas you are passionate about. On university committees, you can serve as the student representative on the bodies making decisions or recommendations on how to run the campus, and in those spaces, you can advocate for your issue.

## **CSU Board of Trustees and the Chancellor**

If you are looking to advocate for something system-wide within the CSU, then this is a good level to do it. The first option that you have is reaching out to your Student Trustees. The Student Trustees went through a competitive selection process and were appointed by the Governor of California to serve as full voting members on the board. They are well versed in student issues, and reaching out to them to get their perspective, or advocating for their support on your issue is a great step to take. You can also speak during public comment at a CSU Board of Trustees meeting or submit public comments online.

Another option is to bring your issue to the California State Students Association (CSSA), which is comprised of representatives from the student governments of the 23 CSU campuses. The CSSA acts as the official voice of nearly half a million CSU students, so bringing an issue up during public comment at the Board of Directors meeting, or the relevant committee, can put the issue on student government radars. From there you can reach out to your campus's CSSA representative, or a CSSA officer, and see about getting the issue on a meeting agenda. CSSA has a variety of committees whose membership is made up of students from across the CSU system, and work on advocating for issues that would benefit all students. Along with this, CSSA from time to time will have taskforces that students can join to help shape advocacy on a specific issue. Most recently CSSA put together a task force on University Policing, and the resolution that the task force developed was officially adopted into the CSSA policy agenda.



## **State Level Advocacy**

### **What is advocacy at the State level?**

One of the many advantages to being a student advocate in California is the existence of a very strong and well-funded state government. California hosts a full-time legislature that due to the taxes that the state collects, can craft impactful legislation that can have real funding attached to it. Take for example the Cal-Grant, which provides up to \$14,226 a year to students pursuing a degree (Cal Grant 1). This program was established with the Ortiz-Pacheco-Poochigian-Vasconcellos Cal Grant Act and made college possible for millions of students since its passage in 2000 (Cal Grant 2). Not many states can boast of a stronger state government, so the possibilities for what changes can be made at the state level are enormous.

Advocacy at this level can take a variety of forms due to the many channels that policy can flow through. Students can advocate directly to the Governor for executive action, they can advocate for members of the state legislature and push for legislation to be passed, or they can work with departments or commissions. Due to everything mentioned above, anything from environmental regulations to housing policy, to police reform can be advocated for. New programs can be created, new regulations put in place, or reforms to existing ones can be made, a lot is possible at the state level.

### **Who are the key players?**

The most important player is the Governor of California. Much like the President of the United States, the Governor has a variety of executive powers at their disposal. First and foremost, the governor can sign executive orders, which allow them to make changes to certain policies and regulations, to a greater extent when they identify a state of emergency. In 2020, Governor Newsom used executive orders to expand unemployment eligibility, freeze evictions, and a variety of other changes to grapple with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The governor also plays a critical role in developing the state budget, and through veto power, they have a great deal of control over the final budget.

Another key player in the state legislature. The legislature is comprised of the State Assembly (80 members) and the State Senate (40 members). You will always live in both a Senate and Assembly district, so you will have a local Assemblymember and Senator of whom you are a constituent. The state legislature passes laws and the budget, and because of their diverse 120 members, legislation can be on pretty much anything. Due to the size and diversity of populations that California has, regardless of where on the political spectrum your issue falls, you will likely be able to find a legislator that is sympathetic to your cause.

### **How can you advocate at the State Level?**

As a student, you already have an advantage over traditional policy advocates, elected leaders love students. Since they know that this is not your job (in most cases) and that you are advocating out of a genuine passion for the issue, that works in your favor. One of the most direct forms of advocacy that you can do at the state level is participating in public comment. In the legislature, bills must work their way through committees before they become law, and at those committee hearings, you have the opportunity to speak directly to the members of the legislature. Public comment can be very effective and showing support or opposition for a bill and is a great opportunity for face-to-face interaction with those in power. Public comment can be provided in person here in Sacramento, over the phone (depending on the committee), and in a written form submitted before the hearing.

Another effective means of advocacy is meeting with legislators and/or their staff. During these meetings, you will have the opportunity to bring yourself and those who share your passion for an issue into the office of a legislator and make your case for why they should support or oppose something. These meetings can be scheduled by calling the office of the member you are seeking to meet with and getting the contact information for the scheduler. From there, you can send an email and ask to schedule a meeting, either at their capitol office in Sacramento, or their district office. Your meeting could be focused on a particular bill, or simply an issue that you are passionate about finding a solution to and need the legislator's support.

For the Governor, since they are just one office it is much more difficult to schedule meetings, but that's not to say advocacy isn't possible. Some effective methods to advocate the Governor are calling their office and leaving a comment on a specific issue or legislation or creating a social media campaign around the issue and making sure to tag their social media platforms.

## **Federal Level Advocacy**

### **What is advocacy at the Federal level?**

The federal government is something that almost everyone is the most familiar with, but also the most intimidated to engage with. There are three main body's that make decisions in the federal government, and these include the Executive Branch, Congress, and the Judicial system. Though engaging in advocacy through the courts is possible, as a student advocate you will find the bulk of your successful avenues for advocacy with the Executive Branch and Congress. Due to the much larger size and scope of the federal government, building large coalitions and organizing events that draw media publicity can be essential. Some of the most successful student movements that influenced federal policy came about in the 1960s and 1970s, due to students' integral role in the opposition to the war in Vietnam, but also in the civil rights movements with groups like Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee mobilizing college students.

Federal advocacy can take many forms like meeting with your member of Congress or Senator, writing to federal agencies, organizing events, rallies, or protests, or starting a social media campaign.

### **Who are the key players?**

At the top of the federal government is the President of the United States. The President can sign executive orders, which can direct the operations of the government, including creating or removing rules and regulations, altering federal programs, or moving previously allocated funding. The President also can veto legislation passed by Congress, which gives them a great deal of power over policy. The President is also the face of the nation, and as such, their utilization of speeches and agenda-setting can bring issues national attention.

Federal agencies are another key player, and they fall under the Executive Branch (the President). These agencies are led by those who are appointed by the President. Federal agencies play a critical role in the federal government by performing the bulk of running the country. Take for example the Department of Education, which sets rules and guild lines for education, or the Department of Environmental Protection, which sets and enforces environmental regulations.

Congress, on the other hand, is broken up into two branches, the Senate, and the House of Representatives. Each state is given two Senators regardless of size, and allocated House members based upon population. While Senators represent the entire state, members of Congress have a home district they represent and are elected by. Congress is responsible for passing laws, passing the budget, approving appointments, and a great many other things.

### **How can you advocate at the Federal Level?**

Starting with the most formal way of advocating, reach out to members of Congress! If it is a local issue, contact the office of your local congress member and your state senators. Or, if it is a national issue, do your research and find members of congress who would be ideologically aligned with what you are advocating for. Call their office and get the contact information for the staff that is responsible for the issue area you are advocating in. When you call, you can voice your support or opposition to the topic. Congress also has one line you can call, and once you tell the operator which Congressman you would like to speak to, they can transfer you directly to that office.

No matter what type of federal advocacy you are engaging in, writing to your target audience or providing public comment is effective. This can be physical, such as organizing a letter-writing campaign or virtual through contacting them on social media or over email. For agencies or departments, when they are proposing policy changes, they will often have time dedicated to collecting public comments, this can be done via a public comment form on their website or by writing a specified address.

As previously mentioned, the federal government is responsible for representing a lot more people, in 2021 they represent between 331 and 332 million people. Because of this size, federal advocacy often is most effective when those passionate about an issue collaborate and unify behind a collective voice and then utilize that voice to advocate for change. This can include organizing a march, a rally, a protest, a donation drive, or anything else that can demonstrate to those in the federal government both the determination of your movement and its numbers. For example, nationwide student walkouts in 2018 was a signal to the federal government that their youngest constituents wanted to see gun reform.

## **Public Comment**

Another important tool for advocacy is participating in public comment. From your student government board meetings to the California State Assembly Committee on Higher Education, public comment is held at a variety of places where decisions are being made. During public comment, you will have an opportunity to speak on an issue on the agenda for the meeting, or an issue that is not. This is a great opportunity to speak directly to those making a decision in a public setting where your comments become a part of the meeting.

## **Structure**

Every meeting has a way of dealing with public comment. Some will have it right at the start of the meeting, while others will have public comments on each item of the agenda as the meeting reaches that point. Additionally, how public comment is conducted is different for every meeting as well. For some, you will have a set amount of time that you are allotted to speak, while for others you will only have the opportunity to share your name, the organization or group you belong to, and if you support or oppose the item you are speaking on. Finally, not all meetings allow for members of the meeting you are addressing to respond. In some meetings, like student government meetings, for example, we cannot respond to your public comment in the meeting due to the laws that govern our board. If this is the case, find a way to leave your contact information or reach out to members of the meeting after it is finished. If the meetings are recorded, watching how they have dealt with public comment from past meetings is a great way to see how it works for that particular meeting.

## **Preparation**

One of the strongest messages that you can deliver in public comment is strength in numbers. Mobilizing a group of students to come to advocate alongside you and share support or opposition for the same thing can demonstrate that the issue is important to a lot of people and bring awareness to it. Coordinate with those who are passionate about the issue ahead of time, mobilize them to show up to the meeting (a few minutes before the time public comment is scheduled!!!), and plan talking points or specific issues to focus on so you convey a united message. If the meeting you are attending allows for a set amount of time, write out what you want to say and rehearse it before the meeting. Being cut off by the chair of a meeting can really throw you off, ending your speech at your own pace is far more impactful.

At some meetings, you can provide public comments without actually attending the meeting in person. Do your research to find if they have a call-in number for the meeting to provide public comment, or if they have a form or email to submit written public comment. If you provide this information to other students, you can engage people that might not be free at that time or are too nervous to show up in person and speak live.

## **Meeting with Those in Positions of Power**

Meeting with the people that have the authority to enact the change you are advocating for is a critical step and at any of these levels, whether you are meeting with your member of Congress or your college president, it can feel intimidating! It's important to remember that they are working for you, whether it is your tax dollars or tuition fees, in some way they have been selected to serve you as a student or a constituent. You belong in these spaces, and they are normal people like you. With that said, preparation is key.

### **Individual**

One on One meetings can seem like the most intimidating since it's just you and them, but they can also be the most productive. You are more likely to have these kinds of meetings with people like your campus administrators or staff in offices. One on One meetings are great for gathering information about an issue, take a meeting with your campus's Provost regarding impaction rates in your department as an example of this. Don't be discouraged if they want to meet over the phone instead of in-person (or over ZOOM), some of our most productive meetings in student government have been personal phone calls with administrators.

In terms of preparation, for these meetings having an agenda for your discussion that you send ahead of time is a great practice. It ensures that who you are meeting with can prepare for the exact topics you wish to discuss and gives you something to go off for the meeting if you lose your train of thought. If you are looking for more information, make sure you can get a timeline set up for following up. If you wanted more information about the budget of a department, don't just leave it at them saying they will get it for you, ask for a rough estimate of when they can get it to you by, and then follow up on that date if you don't hear from them.

### **Group**

Group meetings can be very effective advocacy tools. These kinds of meetings are likely to be had when meeting with legislators or other people in appointed positions like CSU Trustees. For these meetings coordination between you and your group is essential. Some great best practices are to develop talking points for the meeting, which are a set of topics you wish to discuss with researched stories or information attached. These talking points can be assigned to group members ahead of time so that everyone gets a chance to participate, and everything gets covered. On that same topic, you should assign someone to be a facilitator, to help queue group members to participate and ensure that you are respectful of their time. Hoping on a ZOOM or rehearsing in person beforehand with your group can be a great way to ensure you are prepared.

In either type of meeting, always try to be respectful. Often you may disagree with the conclusions that they come to or the stances that you hold, and if you are unprofessional then there's a very little chance that you will change their mind or move them. Be willing to find common ground and understand that sometimes advocacy is a marathon, not a sprint. Today's meeting might not have worked, but your next one might so keep advocating!

### **What To Do When Things Go Wrong**

1. Don't Panic. Mistakes are normal, especially when you are just learning the best ways to advocate. Accept that something went wrong and move on.
2. Don't Give Up. Sometimes, the advocacy process is long and difficult, and it is easy to get frustrated! Take a step back and breathe. Remember why you started advocating for this issue and why you are passionate about it and keep that with you when you are advocating. Sometimes you get rude comments or a flat-out "no" from a legislator, and it's hard to hear. Just keep working and advocating and building your voice. Your hard work will pay off eventually, and the world will be better for it! y
3. Find a different route. If the advocacy route you were on isn't working, there are lots of alternatives! Find one and start again. For example, if an elected official is not responding to your letter writing campaign, mobilize your team to call into their office or attend public comment so they have to acknowledge your presence in the conversation.

## **Conclusion**

We hope that this toolkit has been beneficial in supporting your advocacy efforts. These guidelines are all just a starting point to what there is to know about each level and how to advocate in it. Please take some time and watch the accompanying workshop series that goes with this toolkit where we sat down with experts at each level of government to discuss student advocacy. Their voices and experience are incredibly valuable, and we came away from those meetings stronger advocates even after writing the majority of this toolkit prior to the interviews.

Student advocacy can be incredibly difficult, but also extremely rewarding. As college students in the current era, we face so many issues, each of which is deserving of being addressed. The institutions that have the power to solve many of those issues move slowly or are cautious to make substantial changes, don't let that stop you. Every successful advocate has had bills or policies that they supported and worked to pass that eventually did not come to fruition. Sometimes change isn't successful in its first push, if you watch the state legislature, for example, the same bill under a different number might be introduced 4 years in a row. This is done because with each unsuccessful attempt you can learn more about what works and what doesn't, and conditions can change that might make the bill more likely to pass.

This last year, Assembly Bill 1460, by Assemblymember Shirley Weber, was signed into law by Governor Newsom. Because of that piece of legislation, every single student that goes through the CSU system will now have to take an ethnic studies course as a graduation requirement. Ensuring students have cultural competency and are exposed to the issues that have, and continue to, threaten the success of members of our campus community is of critical importance to building a better future, and that wouldn't have been done without student advocacy. Students across the state of California joined together to voice the necessity of this graduation requirement, went to the capitol to lobby for its passage, and flooded the governor's office with calls each day asking for his signature on the bill. Students were essential in making that change.

Your voice can make a difference, so get out there and use it! Whatever it is that you are passionate about, it's never too early to start advocating for it. Find people with the same passions as you, build coalitions, and make change. You are never alone in these efforts, and don't hesitate to reach out to your ASI for help. Regardless of if the student government is taking a stance on the issue, they will help get you in contact with the right people. So, best of luck in your advocacy!

**Review the recorded workshop series for advice from experts, alumni, and elected officials!!!**