Keys to Effectively Educating Your Legislators

- **Make an Appointment to See Your Legislators**
  Legislative offices are much more responsive to constituent and educator requests than they are to CARD staff queries. If you make an appointment in your local area, please contact Susan Baldino at susanbaldino@comcast.net and let her know. We do not want to waste legislators’ time with multiple appointments unless absolutely necessary.

  *First*, collect contact information. You can find phone numbers to both local and capital offices, fax numbers, and emails addresses at the following web addresses:  
  [http://www.myfloridahouse.gov](http://www.myfloridahouse.gov) and [http://www.flsenate.org](http://www.flsenate.org)

Email Requests should look like this example:

To the Honorable H. Marlene O'Toole;
 Dear Representative O'Toole:

REQUEST FOR MEETING:
When: Week of January 14, 2013
Where: Tallahassee House Office
Who: Parent Advocate for the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities
Other Parent Advocate Attending: TBD

Please contact me back at 123-456-7890, to set up scheduling.
I look forward to hearing from you soon.
Sincerely,

Please be sure to address the Senator or Representative correctly: Dear Senator Smith, OR Dear Representative Smith,

When phoning, you will usually speak with a Legislative Aide to schedule the appointment. Please have your calendar ready along with information about CARD. Some Legislators are new and may not be familiar with our organization.

**FOLLOW-UP!!** If you hadn’t heard from the Legislators, it is important to follow-up via phone a week to a week and half prior to the week requesting the appointment.

**Good Luck!** If any questions or problems, feel free to contact FSU CARD parent, Carrie Stevens (850-274-9474), and she will be more than happy to help as soon as possible.

**An Important Tip to Remember:** Legislative aides have great influence and are often most knowledgeable about many issues. Aides will get your message to the legislator. When a legislator does not have time to become an expert on every issue, aides are relied on to research and suggest positions on certain subjects.

- **Call Your Legislators**
  - Identify yourself by name, and organization or affiliation with the issue.
  - Make your point: “I am interested in the budget request for Florida Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities – Please vote to increase funding for CARD.”
  - **Add a personal story:** “Without CARD, my family could not have coped with the diagnosis of Autism...” “CARD made a big difference in my child’s education...” CARD trained me so I can deal with autism in the classroom...”
  - Send a thank you note to follow-up your call.

Sample Telephone Script:

"Hi, this is Nancy Jones calling from Bay County. Is Senator Gaetz available?"
"(Chances are the legislator will not be available and you will talk with the person who answered the phone or another aide. Whomever you talk to is valuable!)"
"I’m calling Senator Gaetz to share my hope for an increase in funding for the Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities. My 7-year-old son, Joe, has autism. CARD has helped my family when he needed to be toilet trained, and again when we had problems with his learning how to communicate. Then, CARD provided training for his teachers so he could get along in school."
"I am asking Senator Gaetz to help CARD by voting to increase its funding."

- **Write Letters to Your Legislators**
  - REMEMBER... Legislators receive an abundance of mail each day.
  - Handwritten letters that are legible get more attention than any other mail a legislator receives!!
  - Email Messages are only effective if you clearly state the specific action you are requesting in the subject line (i.e., “Support Increased Funding for the Florida Centers for Autism”).
  - Ask your friends and relatives to write a letter too!
  - Send THANK YOU letters when you receive a response to your letter!!
  - See the templates we have prepared to get ideas.
Senate Education Committee

Senator John Legg, Republican - CHAIR
(813) 909-9919 Legg.john.Web@Flsenate.Gov
262 Crystal Grove Blvd. Lutz 33548

Senator Bill Montford, Democrat - VICE-CHAIR
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58 Market Street Apalachicola 32320

Senator Lizbeth Benaquisto, Republican
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Representative Larry Lee Jr., (D)
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Representative W. Keith Perry, (R)
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Representative Jake Raburn, (R)
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Representative Betty Reed, (D)
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Representative Charlie Stone, (R)
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Representative Manny Diaz, Jr. (R)
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