

# CT SpeaksUp



CONNECTICUT  
ASSOCIATION  
of NONPROFITS

Share your story.

Speak up.



**Join the movement.**



## To Connecticut's Nonprofit Community:

### Welcome!

The Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits) welcomes you to the *CT Speaks Up* campaign. We are asking all nonprofits across the state to speak up about why our sector is so vital to the health and well-being of Connecticut. Throughout the campaign, nonprofits will inform elected officials at all levels of government about their missions and the critical roles they play in their communities.

### Why advocate?

Nonprofits are driven by social missions that improve the lives of those around us. We strive for social change within our communities and advocacy is an essential tool to make that change.

Providing direct services is critical to our communities and helps meet immediate needs. But the greatest success comes from bridging the divide between direct service and advocacy. An organization that only focuses on direct services and doesn't strive for systemic change in the larger society will simply be stuck spinning its wheels. When we advocate we can create reform, change public behaviors and establish solutions to the challenges within our communities.

### Why join the *CT Speaks Up* campaign?

The fact is that nonprofits touch the lives of thousands of Connecticut residents every day, whether it's protecting the environment, caring for those with disabilities, enriching local communities through the arts or ensuring that a child has a safe place in which to thrive and grow. Nonprofits have close ties to the community and we are the experts on the needs of those we serve.

State laws, regulations and the state budget impact nonprofit organizations every day. They impact how we provide services and the amount, if any, of governmental funding available to support those services. It is crucial that nonprofits have a voice in the process. Nonprofits must build relationships with policy makers and educate them on how valuable we are to the communities we serve.

The state has faced both unprecedented challenges and opportunities in recent years. Not only has it grappled with enormous budget deficits, but new leaders have emerged in all levels of government with alternative policy directions in mind. Now is an opportune time to reach out to them and help them fully understand the work we do so that they can make informed decisions.

## What you can do

The *CT Speaks Up* campaign gives legislators across the state the chance to meet with nonprofits in their districts. **We are asking all nonprofits to invite their state Senator and Representative to visit their organization.** Have them meet with your clients, staff, volunteers and board members. Give them a tour of your agency and show them the good work you do for your community every day. Take the time to inform them of the challenges and opportunities facing those you serve.

The *CT Speaks Up* campaign provides you with the tools, tips and support necessary to “speak up” and meet with your elected officials. Together we can work to educate every legislator in this state to ensure that when they vote they do so knowing the sheer magnitude and invaluable contribution of Connecticut’s nonprofit sector.

Please review the following information and make a commitment to join the *CT Speaks Up* campaign and invite your legislator to learn about the work you do and those you serve. Please join the statewide movement of nonprofits “speaking up” today!

### Will you Speak Up?

Tell us that you have made the commitment by signing up at [www.ctnonprofits.org/policy/CTSpeaksUp](http://www.ctnonprofits.org/policy/CTSpeaksUp).



## Finding Your Legislator

To find your legislator, visit [www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/CGAFindLeg.asp](http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/CGAFindLeg.asp). From there you can simply enter your address to find out who represents the area where your organization is located.

Don't forget that many of your clients and consumers likely come from areas beyond the immediate proximity of where your organization is located. For example, if you are located in New Haven but have clients from Milford, you should also reach out to the legislators representing those clients. You can search legislators by town by visiting [www.cga.ct.gov/maps/Townlist.asp](http://www.cga.ct.gov/maps/Townlist.asp).

If you are having difficulty determining which legislators to reach out to, please don't hesitate to contact CT Nonprofits' staff. We're here to help!



## Setting Up Your Meeting

Personal visits are a very effective way to engage legislators. While they may take a little additional planning and time, personal visits are the best way to build a solid foundation for a relationship with your elected official. Cultivating that relationship puts you in a better position to be heard via emails and phone calls in the future.

The 2012 Session of the Connecticut General Assembly will be Wednesday, February 8, 2012 through Wednesday, May 9, 2012. Public hearings, committee meetings and House & Senate sessions typically begin around 10:00 a.m., meaning that legislators must be in Hartford at that time. Therefore, the best time to set up a meeting with a legislator during the session is earlier in the morning.

Depending on where you are located, starting a meeting around 8:00 a.m. will allow your state Senator or Representative to have a meaningful visit with you while still making it to Hartford in time for meetings. This timing may also make it possible for some of your board members to attend prior to the beginning of their work day.

### Before the Meeting

- Call your legislator's office with a few available dates for the meeting (be flexible) and follow up with an email as you await confirmation. Once your legislator has agreed on a meeting date, follow up with a letter confirming the date, time and location. Expect no more than one (1) hour for a typical site visit.
- You can invite multiple legislators to a single meeting if you feel it will meet your meeting goals.
- Have the right people at the meeting. It's important to engage staff, board and clients to be ambassadors for your organization. Have people there who will tell their story and demonstrate the importance of your program(s).
- Learn about your legislator(s) in advance of the meeting. It's helpful to know what committees they serve on and any specific issues that they have worked on recently. Visit your legislator's webpage: **Senate** - [www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/slist.asp](http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/slist.asp) or **House** - [www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/hlist.asp](http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/hlist.asp).
- Determine what you would like to get out of the meeting (e.g.: informational/relationship building, commitment on a vote, etc.) and develop a focused agenda around the desired outcome (*see the sample meeting agenda on the next page*).
- Prepare a packet of background information about your organization and the services you offer.

### During the Meeting

- Be prepared and try not to be nervous. You, your staff, board members and clients are the experts on your services and the positive impact they have on the community. You have valuable information that your legislator needs to make informed decisions.
- Start by introducing your organization, letting your legislator know who you are, your organization's mission, the types of services you provide and the clients and consumers that you serve.
- Divide up the talking points among the staff, board members and clients who have joined you.
- Give the legislator a chance to tell you about her/himself. Ask questions to understand what motivates them or what they care about most.
- It's ok to say, "I don't know." If your legislator asks you a question and you're unsure of the answer, just tell her/him that you'll look into it and follow up with an answer.
- Be prepared for counter-arguments or common misconceptions about your services or clients, but don't be argumentative or confrontational and avoid complaining or overstating the case.
- Ask the legislator how you can be of help to her/him.

**“Nonprofits can play a vital role in the legislative process.** Their first hand level of knowledge and expertise on policy matters is invaluable to state legislators and people that count on state government.”

- State Senator Donald E. Williams, Jr., President Pro Tempore



*Senator Donald E. Williams, Jr. with representatives from Horizons during Nonprofits Week at the Capitol 2011*

## Sample Agenda

- ✓ **Welcome and introductions**
- ✓ **Summary of your organization**
  - Mission, history and who you serve
- ✓ **Share your impact statement**
  - What needs in the community do you address?
  - How do you meet those needs?
  - What resources are necessary for this work?
  - What other elements in the community make your work possible? (i.e. government, philanthropy, local business)
  - How do state government decisions impact your organization?
  - Personal stories of those impacted, if possible.
- ✓ **Site tour (if applicable)**
- ✓ **Listen to your legislator. What are her/his priorities? How can you help?**
- ✓ **Be ready with an “ask” (if applicable). You’ve made your case. Now ask your legislator to be an ally in your shared work of strengthening your community.**

### After the Meeting

- Follow up with a thank you note and offer yourself as a resource. Don’t forget to include any follow up information that was promised during the meeting.
- Stay in touch throughout the year. Don’t hesitate to contact them during session with your perspective on a particular piece of legislation, but also keep them informed about what is going on in your organization. Include your legislators on your e-News or mailing list.
- Don’t forget that a good relationship with legislative staff can mean a world of difference when you are working with your legislators. Take time to meet the staff and build that relationship, too!





*CT House Speaker Christopher Donovan (right) with nonprofit leaders at the 2010 Legislative Reception*

## Tips for Telling Your Story

### Take some time to develop your organization's story.

- Explain what your organization does and who it serves. Include a brief history of your organization and highlight some past successes.
- Use accurate and reliable data when possible, but don't oversaturate your presentation with it. Fact sheets with more detailed information can be part of your informational packet to give legislators.
- When possible quantify the benefit of your work for the community. If your program helps achieve savings for the state and local community, be sure to highlight that!
- Be prepared to identify the sources of your operating budget including the amount of public funding you receive.
- Explain how investments by the state impact your community and the people you serve. Make the connection to how public funds are critical to the health and well-being of your community.
- Make it personal. Personal stories about the positive impact of your services will go a long way in helping legislators understand how your organization meets the needs of their constituents.

# CT SpeaksUp

## Don't Miss Opportunities with Your Annual Events

Many nonprofits hold annual meetings, open houses and fundraisers. These are perfect events to invite your legislators to that will give them a chance to learn about what you do. Use these regularly scheduled events as an additional opportunity to build and strengthen relationships with your legislators. It is also helpful to recognize and award a legislator who has been a champion for your cause.



*State Representative Catherine F. Abercrombie honored at the 2011 CT Nonprofits Conference*

## Need Assistance?

**Online:** Additional resources and information available at [www.ctnonprofits.org/policy/CTSpeaksUp](http://www.ctnonprofits.org/policy/CTSpeaksUp)

## CT Nonprofits' Staff are here to help!

**Call us anytime you have a question or need assistance:**

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Don't forget to visit

[www.ctnonprofits.org/policy/CTSpeaksUp](http://www.ctnonprofits.org/policy/CTSpeaksUp)

and tell us who you are meeting with!

CT Nonprofits is hoping to leverage the collective power of our statewide network to ensure that all 187 state Senators and Representatives have met with a local nonprofit. Please help us reach this goal by not only meeting with your elected officials but taking a minute let to us know about the meeting.



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# Be Part of the CT Speaks Up Campaign!

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and let us know which legislators you are meeting with.

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