

A Guide for
Parents



Home Visiting Advocacy



Prevent Child Abuse
New York

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| What is Advocacy?..... | 1 |
| Fast Facts: Just So You Know..... | 2 |
| The Benefits of Home Visiting..... | 3 |
| Causes and Effects of Child Abuse..... | 4 |
| The New York State Budget Process..... | 5 |
| How a Bill Becomes Law..... | 8 |
| Writing to Your Legislator..... | 9 |
| Meeting with Your Legislator..... | 11 |
| What's Your Message?..... | 12 |
| Presenting Your Message..... | 13 |
| Issues to Advocate For..... | 14 |
| Quick Tips for Parent Advocates..... | 15 |
| Important Contacts..... | 16 |



Welcome & Thank You

Dear Parent Advocate:

Thank you for volunteering to advocate on behalf of home visiting, parenting education and parent support programs throughout New York State.

This is a guide to help familiarize you with the issues, including the benefits of home visiting, and to give you tips on making the most of your advocacy time.

Also included is information on the prevention of child abuse and neglect. We know that parenting is one tough job, and no one can do it alone. Economic and emotional stressors, unrealistic expectations, lack of parenting information and difficulty in relationships can all lead to parents accidentally abusing or neglecting their child.

With programs like home visiting, we know that families' needs are met in ways that prevent parent's anxieties reaching their children. And children that are not abused or neglected, and are raised in healthy, supported households have the best chance at a long, successful life.

Legislators often ask, "Why should we fund these programs?" and one of our answers is that they prevent child abuse and neglect - a goal that's necessary to get certain types of funding.

By advocating today, you are speaking for yourself, your child, your family, your program and your community. The children of New York State thank you for this hard, and sometimes frustrating, work.

If you have any questions about advocating for home visiting or another children and families' cause, please don't hesitate to contact our office at 518-445-1273 or via email at mgross@preventchildabuseny.org. We'd be happy to help.

Thank you, and good luck!

The Staff at Prevent Child Abuse New York



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<http://www.preventchildabuseny.org>



What is Advocating?

Advocating is communicating with a legislator, to express a view about specific legislation:

- Communicating may be in-person or phone conversations, letters, email, etc.
- Legislators include representatives and their staff at all levels of government, as well as the governor, president, or other executive official who participates in formulating legislation.
- Specific legislation includes appropriations, the budget, as well as everything with a bill number.

Advocacy versus Lobbying

Advocacy is the active promotion of a cause or principle through education, current research and background information on a specific topic.

Lobbying involves conducting activities aimed at influencing public officials regarding specific legislation.

Advocacy covers a range of activities broad enough to include just about everyone, in just about any kind of setting. Advocacy means to speak up, to plead the case of another, or to champion a cause. For nonprofit organizations, this means speaking out on behalf of the people they serve, and asking people to help in carrying out the organization's mission. Examples of advocacy include: speaking out about the rights or benefits to which someone is entitled; or taking action to ensure that institutions work the way they should.

Information courtesy <http://www.ombwatch.org> and <http://wch.uhs.wisc.edu>



Fast Facts: Just So You Know

In 2005, 64,207 New York State children were abused and/or neglected.

There are several factors that protect against child abuse and neglect:

Nurturing and Attachment

- Early stages of life are vital in the development of a child.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child and Youth Development

- Without the proper knowledge, parents are frustrated and overwhelmed.

Parental Resilience

- Parents that are resilient are more likely to have positive attitudes and better problem solving capabilities.

Social Connections

- With a universal program of assistance, parents will be provided with a large network of reassurance and stability.

Concrete Support for Parents

- Home visiting programs can provide a more personal, reliable resource for parents.

Accomplishing all or part of the above will contribute to the prevention child abuse and neglect.

Remember: Parents are not born parents, they need education and supports to be the best parents that they can be!



The Benefits of Home Visiting

Fewer low birth weight babies:

- Babies weighing less than 5lbs are considered low weight.
- Approximately 1 out of 13 births are of low weight babies.
- Low weight babies have much greater risk of critical health issues.

Fewer children lacking needed medical care:

- Research shows that home visiting reduces hospitalization and emergency room visits.

Sustained access to health insurance and primary care:

- Children are more likely to have health insurance and less likely to go without needed medical care.

Fewer violent acts toward children by mothers:

- With a larger support system and direct assistance, mothers feel less overwhelmed by the stresses of being a parent.

Reduced number of pregnancies, minor physical aggression and harsh parenting by young parents:

- With a high percentage of unintended pregnancies, it is important to educate unexpected parents on raising a child.

Fewer incidents of serious physical abuse when mothers showed signs of depression and sensed loss of control:

- 20% of new mothers experience clinical depression. Home visiting can provide early detection of these symptoms.

Reduction in criminal activity by children and mothers:

- Including a 59% reduction in adolescent arrests, a 61% reduction in arrests of mothers, and a 90% reduction in the number of PINS cases.

Increased school readiness:

- Children involved in home visiting have significantly increased school readiness scores, bridging the achievement gap, as well as increasing parents' verbal responsiveness to their children.

Better school performance:

- Graduates of home visiting often score higher than the national average on elementary reading and math tests.

Additionally:

- Reduced subsequent births of at-risk mothers.
- Increased the stability of parent relationships.
- Facilitated school readiness.

Information courtesy of research on Healthy Families New York, Nurse-Family Partnership, and the Parent-Child Home Program.



Causes and Effects of Child Abuse

Child abuse and neglect is often a vicious cycle. Typically, abusive parents have histories of abuse or deprivation in childhood and in turn treat their children similarly. It's estimated that one-third of abused children will one day abuse their offspring.

Domestic Violence: Domestic Violence places children at greater risk for continuing the generational cycle of violence. In a domestic violence study, 33% of alleged abusers were found themselves to have been abused by their parents. Fifty percent of their parents were themselves involved in battering relationships.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse: Alcohol and drug abuse is both a risk factor for, and an effect of, child abuse. In fact, substance abuse is one of the top problems exhibited by families in child abuse and neglect cases. Children of substance-abusing parents are three times more likely to be abused and four times more likely to be neglected, and about two-thirds of people in drug treatment programs report that they were abused as children.

Juvenile Delinquency and Adult Criminal Behavior: Being abused or neglected as a child increases the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 53%, as an adult by 38% and for violent crime by 38%. Violent child victimizers are substantially more likely to have been physically or sexually abused as children than those who victimize adults.

Injuries and Health Problems: In 2000, 4,532 substantiated child injuries were sustained as a result of abuse in New York. However, this is probably a small percentage of all the injuries received by children since most are never reported.

Learning Problems: The most rapid period of brain development throughout the lifespan occurs during the first three years of life. Delayed and disordered development is very common in children that are abused or neglected, requiring extensive special services during childhood.

Homelessness: Adverse childhood experiences are powerful risk factors for adult homelessness. The likelihood of homelessness among individuals who experience abuse and neglect during childhood increases tremendously.

Teen Mothers: Teenage childbearing often decreases opportunities for both mother and child. On average, the children of teen mothers are less healthy, more likely to suffer child abuse and be placed in foster care, more likely to engage in criminal behavior and less likely to be economically and socially successful as adults.

Prostitution: Child prostitutes are victims of sexual abuse. A study of prostitution found that 70% of prostitutes reported that sexual abuse as children definitely affected their circumstances to become prostitutes and 90% were juvenile runaways forced into prostitution.

Public Assistance: Studies have concluded that being abused as a child increases one's chances of being unemployed and relying on public assistance in later life.



The New York State Budget Process

Home visiting programs rely on state funding to continue serving families in their community. Each year, we advocate to increase budgetary allotments for these beneficial programs. The following is a summary of the budget process for your reference.

The Governor is required by the State Finance Law to manage the budget during the Fiscal Year. New York State's fiscal year begins April 1st and ends on March 31st; however the "budget cycle" - period of time between early budget preparation and final disbursements - begins approximately 9 months earlier and lasts on average 27 months

The formal budget cycle does not begin until the Budget Director issues policy memorandum, considered a "call letter" addressing agency needs.

Here's the approximate budget timeline:

June to September/October:

Agency/Organization Budget Preparation: The preparation of budget requests varies among agencies/organizations, including:

- Size, complexity, and internal practice.
- Project manager/leader would most likely set an outline of budgetary needs.
- Final program package is assembled by each agency.

Guided by the instructions set by Division of the Budget, agency/organizations evaluate consistency with "call letter" and seek final approval by agency/organization director.

September/October to December:

Budget Division Review: The Division of Budget begins to review agency/organization submissions:

- Usually agencies submit their budget requests early to mid-fall.
- Examinations of requests of agencies are made within the Division of Budget.
- Examiners may request additional information from the agency/organization, including clarifications and more precise definitions.

In November:

Formal Budget Hearings: This is where agency heads have the opportunity to present and discuss their budget requests. In response, the Division of the Budget Director and the Governor's office has an opportunity to raise critical questions about the program, policy, and priorities. In addition, members of the Legislature participate in hearings.



The New York State Budget Process

“Quick Start” Budget Process:

- November 5th: The Division of Budget, the Legislature and the Comptroller release detailed forecasts of revenues and expenditures.
- November 15th: Representative staff members of each release a consensus forecast of the state’s financial position.
- Through November: The Division of Budget examiners transform agency requests into preliminary budget and personnel recommendation. They are reviewed in detail with the Director, and appropriation bills and any other legislation required to carry out these recommendations are drafted.
- Early December: The Division of Budget will usually have completed its preliminary recommendations on both revenues and expenditures and thus present to the Governor and his/her staff, creating a “budget story.”

November to January:

Governor’s Decisions: The Governor prepares his draft budget and delivers his yearly “State of the State” message to Legislature, prepared by Governor’s staff.

Final executive Budget recommendations are formulated in a series of meetings between Division of the Budget staff and the Governor, based on preliminary recommendations and economic and fiscal environment.

January to March:

Legislative Action: Typically by mid-January, the Governor submits his Executive Budget to the Legislature. Also submitted are the state’s Five-Year Financial Plan, the Five-Year Capital Program and Financing Plan, and financial information supporting the Executive Budget.

The Legislature (mainly the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees): Analyzes the Governor’s spending proposals and revenue estimates, holds public hearings on major programs, and seeks further information from the Division of the Budget.

- The Legislature is required to use conference committee process between the two houses to organize its deliberations, set priorities, and reach an agreement on the Budget.

- State Finance Law requires that the Executive and the Legislature convene a consensus economic and revenue forecasting conference and issue a consensus report on tax, lottery and miscellaneous receipts on or before March 1st.



The New York State Budget Process

Based on joint deliberations, the two houses reach an agreement on spending and revenue. Amended versions of the Executive Budget are reflected in the Governor's proposed appropriation bills and other legislation approved by both houses.

The Governor must approve or disapprove all parts of appropriation bills. Also, the Legislature must release a report detailing the appropriation changes and the effects of the Enacted Budget on State agency employment levels.

April to March: Budget Execution

The First Step: The Division of Budget approves "certificates of allocation" and informs the State Comptroller that accounts may be established as certificates specify. Additionally, vouchers against the account may be honored.

Soon after the start of the fiscal year, the Division of the Budget issues a comprehensive report that:

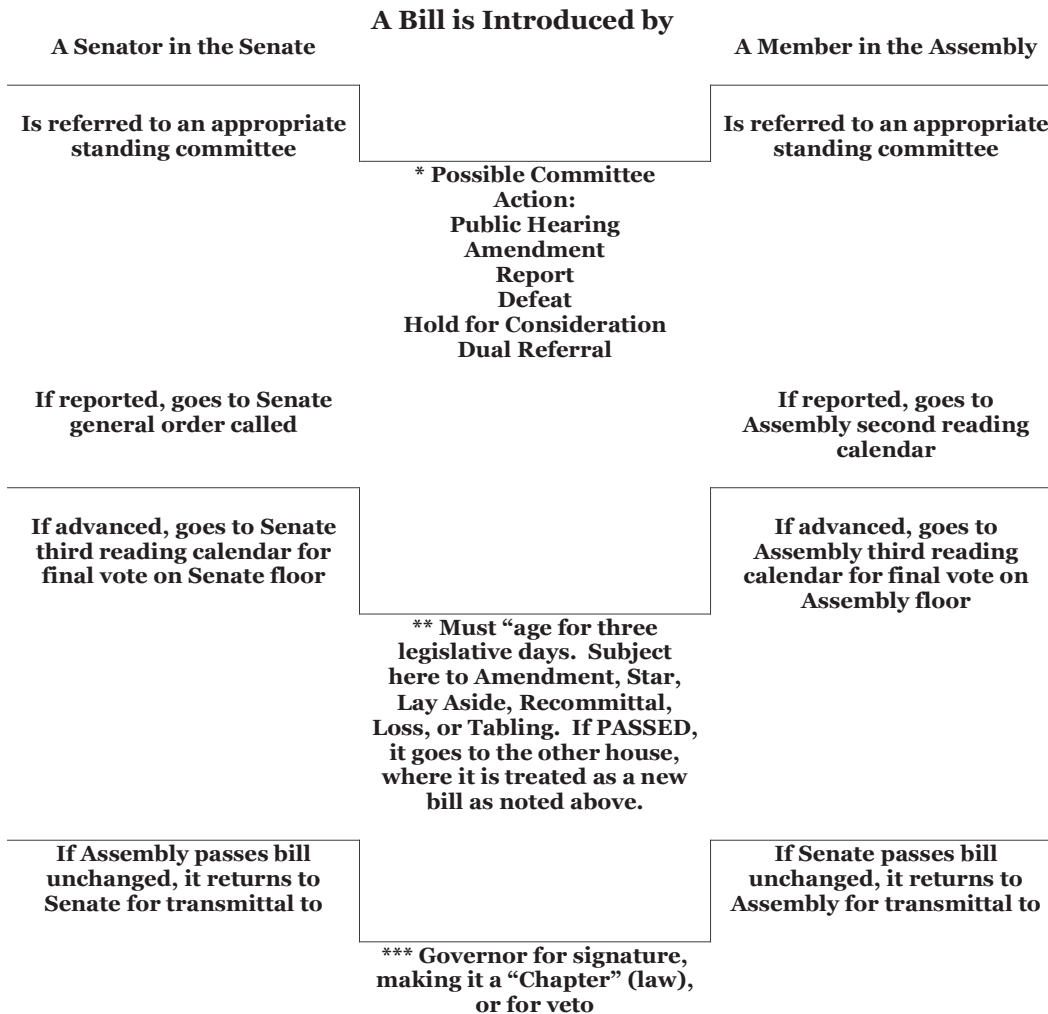
- Compares un-audited year-end results to projections set forth in the Enacted Budget and in the final update of the Financial Plan.
- Summarizes reasons for the annual change in receipts and disbursements.

The Debt Reform Act 2000 requires the Governor to report on the State's compliance with statutory caps placed on new debt issued after March 31, 2000.



How a Bill Becomes Law

HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW IN NEW YORK STATE



*Committee action is probably the most crucial step in the process. Except under certain conditions, no bill is taken up for final consideration until it is reported out of committee. An affirmative vote of a majority of all members of a committee is necessary for a report on the bill. The committee may report a bill favorably, unfavorably, or merely for the consideration of the appropriate house. Many bills are not acted on at all.

**Passage of Bills. A bill must be on the desk of members in final printed form for 3 days before it is voted on, unless the Governor issues a message of necessity. To pass, a bill must be voted on favorably by a majority of those elected to each house. When a bill is passed in one house, it is sent to the other. If a companion bill has been introduced in the house receiving the bill, the passed bill may be substituted for its companion in the same order of business. When a bill passes both houses, it is sent to the Governor.

***During the session, the Governor has 10 days, exclusive of Sundays, to approve or veto a bill. If no action is taken within that time, the bill becomes a law. If vetoed, it may only become a law if re-passed by a 2/3 majority of each house. After the session adjourns, the Governor has 30 days within which to act.



Writing to Your Legislator

It's estimated that less than ten percent of all New Yorkers will write to or call members of the State Legislature in their lifetime. But lawmakers value your input. In writing your letter, remember these points:

- **Write your own letter or email.** Do not simply copy from an example provided. Personalized letters carry much more weight than a form letter simply signed by you. Take the time to fill in the blanks, or even handwrite the letter.

Inside Hint: Email is not as effective as writing a letter.

Mailing and email addresses can be found at:

www.assembly.state.ny.us: Assembly member

www.senate.state.ny.us: Senate member

- **Write about only one issue per letter.** Combining different issues in one letter can be confusing and diffuse your message. State what you're writing about and make your information accurate. Keep it short and to the point. A concise letter will get better attention. If writing about a specific bill, identify the number and sponsor.

- **Let your legislator know who you are and the program/agency you represent.** If you represent yourself, a constituent, or a person who has benefited from the program you are writing about, fine. If you represent your program or agency, say so and use your organization's letterhead. Be sure to include your name, organization's name (if appropriate), telephone and address.

Inside Hint: Including a return address is very important: letters can easily be lost in the mail.

- **Get to your point quickly in a clear and concise manner.** If you want your legislator to support additional funding for a program, say so. If you want her/him to contact the Senate Majority Leader or Assembly Speaker in support of the program, say so. (If you want your legislator to vote for - or against - a bill, say so.)

- **Be brief.** The real challenge is to include all the information needed in a brief, readily digestible fashion, as crisp and concise as you can make it, preferably no more than one page.

- **Never be abusive or threatening.** Be dignified, sincere and respectful. You do not want to "burn any bridges."

- **Write again!** Especially if you receive no reply in a reasonable amount of time, write again. Be in continuous communication with your legislator.

- **Thank your legislators for their work and support.**

Inside Hint: Include photos of an event or visit.

- **Include further contact and a website/source to find general information about your organization.**



Example Letter to Legislator

USE SIMILAR EXAMPLE FOR LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

XX/XX/200X

YOUR SENATOR OR ASSEMBLYMEMBER
123 Main Street
Anytown, NY 10000

Dear SENATOR OR ASSEMBLYMEMBER:

I'm writing today to ask for your support of home visiting programs, which would make assistance resources available to all at-risk families throughout New York State.

Home Visiting programs are important to my family and our community because....

THIS SECTION SHOULD BE PERSONALIZED BY YOU

My experience with home visiting has been...

THIS SECTION SHOULD BE PERSONALIZED BY YOU

By supporting programs like Healthy Families New York, NFP etc., and home visiting, we're reforming our reactive child welfare system and promoting a proactive approach to prevent child abuse and support families.

Please support our families, and increase funding for home visiting programs today!

Very truly yours,

YOUR NAME



Meeting With Your Legislator

There are basic rules of thought when meeting with a legislature.

Visiting your legislator in his/her district office is one of the most effective advocacy techniques. Your program provider will set-up the meeting, but here are a few tips for you.

Before the Meeting

- **Know your facts and figures.** Your provider can give you some quick information on the program, how many families are involved, how it helps, etc.
- **Know your story.** Be prepared with what you're going to say, and stick to it. Practice your message.
- **Know the status of the budget and what you're asking for.** Do you want more funding and support? Do you just want the legislator to be aware of the program? What's your goal?

General Meeting Etiquette

- **Arrive on time and stay until the end.** If this meeting does not seem important to you, it will not be important to your legislator.
- **Always be respectful.** Being disrespectful is a good way not to be heard.

When Speaking

- **The message, the message, the message.** No matter what's asked, stick to the message.
- **Remember that legislators are part of your community too.** When referring to your community, use the word "our."
- **Choose your words carefully.** Avoid pitfalls, for example, "I liked the program so much, I came back for my second child!" While this seems positive, it tells the legislator that you didn't learn enough the first time around, you had to come back.
- **Avoid acronyms and jargon.** Legislators do not always "speak your language," so using acronyms like HFNY, NFP, PCHP will only lead to confusion. Don't assume that legislators, or the public, understand what you're talking about. Always explain.



What's Your Message?

Some Topics for Consideration:

- How have home visiting programs helped your family?
- How has the home visiting program contributed to your work status?
- Speak about a positive relationship you have had with your home visitor.
- How is your child doing in school as a result of the home visiting program?

How has your home visiting program changed you?

- New York State spends the majority of funding on supporting those who cannot support themselves. Home visiting programs aim to teach and guide parents toward self-sufficiency.
- Healthy development is accomplished through the promotion of early literacy and school readiness.
- Programs teach parents how to interact with their infant or toddler.
- Programs include preventive screening for risk of health concerns, such as autism, hearing loss, lead poisoning and developmental delays.
- With higher rates of education and lower rates of behavioral problems, several studies have shown that with early preventive and preparative actions, children are more likely to become productive members of society, in turn reducing crime.

What was your incentive to be involved in home visiting programs?

- Was the program doable with work and other responsibilities?
- As a parent, you can provide the most insight to the benefits of home visiting programs.
- What attracts parents to such programs?

Programs not only benefit children, but their parents as well:

- Reduced welfare dependency.
- Higher educational completion.
- Increased job retention.
- Reduction in the frequency and severity of abuse and neglect.
- Increased involvement in the community.



Presenting Your Message

Present your message – short, clear and concise. This is the most important part of the process:

- **Let the legislator know who you are, and why you're there.**
- **Talk about the program that you participate in and what it does for you.** How does the program work?
- **Talk about the benefits of the program.** How has the program changed your life?
- **Let the legislator know the role the program plays in your community.**
- **Avoid being a zealot.** Be clear and firm, but remember fanatics impress no one. A reasoned approach and your committal to an issue can take you much further.
- **Stay positive.** Talk about the benefits, not how awful the world is.
- **Correct errors immediately.** When many people participate in an advocacy campaign, errors can occur.
- **Pay attention during the meeting.** Answer questions as you can. If you don't have an answer, refer to the program provider.
- **Follow up on your visit.** No matter how the meeting went, it's essential that you follow it up with a thank you letter.



Issues to Advocate For

Provide Universal Contact: A Home Visit for Every Family

The larger the network is, the more families that can be supported. Having advocates reach out to each new family at least once will provide a point of contact when times get tough.

Phase in a Universal System of Comprehensive Services and Care for Families

Rome was not built in a day, nor can a universal system be. The system must be implemented carefully and with attention to the needs of families and the constraints of our current system.

Build Capacity at Both Ends

All families need varying levels of support. Some parents have tremendous family and community foundations, but may welcome a one-time home visit. Other families will need more directed and long-term solutions, such as intensive home visiting services. Both ends of the pyramid must be provided for.

Strengthen the Web of Services Geographically as well as Conceptually

Spread the word! All families from all regions and of all educational, economic and health conditions benefit from home visiting. Service growth is necessary in the most at-risk communities, as well as “low-risk” communities. Without a comprehensive web, families will slip through the cracks unseen.

Patch Holes in the Safety Net

Programs can catch cases in which a family may need help - but there are too many holes in the net. Once families are identified, immediate and proper care must be provided - whether the care is medical, educational or emotional.

Institute a Cross-County Referral System

Families are mobile, and moving your family, whether for a new opportunity or out of economic necessity, should not mean losing your support services. By investing in a cross-county referral system, providers can ensure continuity of care as families move from one home to another.

Enhance Parenting Education, School Readiness and Early Literacy

Education is the key to children’s healthy and successful development. Home visiting and other parent support programs offer families the opportunity to learn, grow and better provide for their children.

Invest in the Evaluation and Assessment of Program Outcomes

It’s important not only to invest in programs, but also to ensure that programs are accomplishing their goals.

Increase Funding

There is no price tag on the welfare of a child. Raising healthy, productive, happy children should be a fundamental goal of our state government, and society as a whole.



Quick Tips for Parent Advocates

- **Your voice is most important.** Children in your community cannot represent themselves. It's your responsibility, and privilege, to speak out for them.
- **Personal accounts of home visiting stories are the most effective.** Tell your story. How has this program changed your life for the better? Why is it important?
- **Join a local organization with your goals and ideas in mind.** There are several child advocacy organizations throughout the state, including Prevent Child Abuse New York and the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. They can provide a guide and funnel for you to help change policies.
- **Having a united group of advocates is more powerful.** The more voices behind you, the louder the message.
- **Agencies and organizations are representing you.** Your concerns are important to them, and government representatives want to hear what you have to say. It's your children that are affected, what do you feel is necessary for their safe and healthy development?
- **REMEMBER EVERY VOICE COUNTS.** You have the power to make a difference, and to help sustain and expand home visiting programs to support all families throughout the State.
- **You are not alone.** Prevent Child Abuse New York has resources for you and your organization, including sample press releases, letters to the editor, memos of support and other assistance to help make the most of your advocacy work! Call 518-445-1273 for further information, or visit our website at <http://www.preventchildabuse.ny.org>



Important State Contacts

NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE

New York State Senate
Albany, NY 12247
Switchboard: 518-455-2800
Public Information Office, 323 State Capitol, 518- 455- 3216
Bill Status Hotline: 518-455-7545 or 1-800-342-9860
Website <http://www.senate.state.ny.us/>

New York State Assembly
Albany, NY 12248
Switchboard: 518-455-4100
Public Information Office, Room 204, Legislative Office Building, 518- 455-4218
Bill Status Hotline: 518-455-4218 or 1-800-342-9860
Website: <http://assembly.state.ny.us/>

Hotlines for New York Senate: Information on Status of Bill
518-455-7545 or 800-342-9860

Hotlines for New York Assembly: Information on Status of Bill
518-455-4218 or 800-342-9860

To retrieve Senate and Assembly bill documents, visit the respective house's website.

NEW YORK STATE GOVERNOR

Governor Elliot Spitzer
State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224
General Phone Number: 518-474-8390
Internet: <http://www.ny.gov/governor>



Important Federal Contacts

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, DC 20500
Comment Number: 202-456-1111
Email: president@whitehouse.gov
Website: <http://www.whitehouse.gov>

UNITED STATES SENATE

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton
US Senate
476 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
Phone: 518-431-0120
Website: <http://www.clinton.senate.gov>

Senator Charles Schumer
757 Third Avenue, Suite 17-02
New York, NY 10017
Phone: 212-486-4430
Website: <http://www.schumer.senate.gov>

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Your Representative
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
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Important Advocacy Contacts

PREVENT CHILD ABUSE NEW YORK

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SCHUYLER CENTER FOR ANALYSIS AND ADVOCACY

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