



Michigan Association for the
Education of Young Children

An Affiliate of **naeyc**

Lawmaker Site Visit Toolkit

Inviting lawmakers and candidates to visit your program is a great way to help them experience a high-quality early learning environment in the personal way you do every day. You are essential in helping legislators make the connection between high quality early education and school readiness, see firsthand the important role that early childhood professionals have, and understand the need for more resources to provide more high quality opportunities for more children. A successful site visit can lead to a long term connection, where your lawmaker views you as a valuable resource and will be more receptive and understanding of future conversations about needs in Early Childhood.

Getting Started

Planning a site visit can be both exciting and intimidating. You can do this! Remember that your elected official serves you and your community, including young children and families. They are invested in hearing about your experiences and concerns. Lawmakers can't be experts on everything and so they need your knowledge and stories to help them make decisions that positively impact the community they serve. You are the expert!

Consider your level of comfort and which MiAEYC or other resources are appropriate to help you feel confident, informed and prepared:

- [Introductory video clip \(1:32\)](#)
- Handout ([Word version](#)) ([PDF](#))
- [OUNCE of Prevention Early Childhood Advocacy Toolkit](#)

If you are still feeling overwhelmed or have questions, reach out to the Michigan AEYC Advocacy Committee at advocacy@miaeyc.org.

Choosing your Elected Official

Consider whether you would like to invite a lawmaker at the local, state, or federal level. Any lawmakers visit can be impactful. State and local officials may have more availability, while federal congressional members and state legislators make policy and budget decisions so their

time may have to be scheduled out or consider a virtual visit. Even your local mayor or school board member can be a powerful advocate to have understanding the issues.

[Find your elected officials here!](#)

[Choosing your elected official](#)

Visit Planning

Plan a visit that reinforces the core message you want to relay.

What makes a good visit?

- The site is a high-quality program, but has struggles with regard to resources, compensation, affordability, etc
- An opportunity to interact with parents and children or youth, which will give a greater sense of urgency than just talking with administrators
- Ensure that Program staff are well prepared
- A brief, well-planned presentation with ample opportunities for dialog

Message

It is critical to convey a message that transcends the specific site, so that the elected official(s) walks away with a greater understanding about local early care and education needs, not just a specific opinion about one program they visited. Use the time to share your successes and challenges as an early child care provider. Here are some resources to get you started:

- a. [Michigan AEYC Policy Agenda 20-21](#)
- b. [NAEYC Policy Priorities and Initiatives](#)
- c. [America for Early Ed: Agenda for States](#) (NAEYC)
- d. [Elevator pitch video clip](#) (1:31)
- e. [American Heart Association: How to talk to legislators](#) (1:54)

Steps to a Successful Visit:

Step 1: Find your elected official

Step 2: Identify a few potential dates, preferably 1-3 months out. Keep in mind that in Michigan, state legislators are typically in their districts on Mondays and Fridays, as they are in-session in Lansing Tuesday-Thursday.

Step 3: Call the official's office

- Call the official's office at least a month in advance
 - [Sample Invitation Letter](#)
- Note the staff member's name for follow-up

- Ask to schedule a time for the Senator or Representative (or other elected official) to visit your program.
- Provide several dates that work for your schedule
- Ask if the lawmaker would like to read a book or otherwise engage with the children.
- Be sure to mention that staff and parents will be on hand for the visit and offer to invite media as well if possible
- Highlight how your program relates to the policymaker's interests (school readiness, healthy development, supporting work, literacy, improving academic achievement in public schools, keeping communities safe by decreasing juvenile crime, helping families, etc.).
- Tell them you will follow up with an email including information about the program and who will be at the visit.

Step 4: Before the visit

- Keep in mind that elected officials' schedules can change with little notice. Several days before the visit, call to confirm the event and be prepared to reschedule.
- Identify parents, program staff, school officials and community partners who would be compelling spokespeople for your program.
- Invite key partners, supporters, your school's principal and school board members (if applicable). Assign someone from your staff or volunteers to be a media advisory to invite press and prepare a press release for the day of the event.
 - [Media Advisory Template \(NAEYC\)](#)
 - [How to alert media about your event \(Wisconsin Historical Society\)](#)
- Talk with staff members to prepare them and the space to be presented in a professional way.
- Practice your introduction and personal story, think through the "what ifs"

Step 5: Day of the visit

- Have someone wait outside the building to greet and direct the visitors to the correct location/entrance.
- Have program brochures or a program profile on hand. You may want to make copies of any articles, parent letters, awards or other documents that demonstrate community support for your program.
- Have notes with you to help you stay on track and cover your important talking points.
- Be prepared for the legislator and/or staff to be running late. Be flexible and respectful of their time.
- Have a camera ready, along with an experienced photographer to operate it. Be prepared to share photos on social media after the visit after getting permission from the legislator. Consider whether or not you want to show children's faces and if you have permission to do so.
- Tour your facility and engage in dialog before inviting the lawmaker to read or otherwise engage with the children.

- Allow time to answer their questions. If you are not familiar with the issue, let them know that you will get back with them and follow up promptly. Michigan AEYC can help support you with this.
- Offer a to be a resource on Early Childhood issues.
- Thank the Senator or Representative and staff for taking the time to visit.
- Other ideas to consider:
 - Ask parents to share their perspectives; ask a police officer, youth counselor, pediatrician or health leader to talk about the benefits to children who attend your program.
 - Attendees can be brought closer to the issue through interactive experiences. For example, sitting in little chairs with children in structured time (such as breakfast or story time) or enjoying a snack with the youth and talking with them about their favorite parts of the program can be effective.
 - Have the children collaborate on an art piece to gift to the lawmaker. Ideally make it not too large and framable (or frame it for them).
 - After showing them your program and sharing the challenges involved in delivering high quality learning opportunities with so few resources, ask the legislators directly to vote in support of more state dollars invested in early childhood education.

Step 6: After the visit.

- Send thank you notes to both the policymaker and any staff that attend and reiterate some of the things you discussed.
 - Include any answers to questions asked during the visit. Include any pictures taken from the day.
 - [Sample Thank You Letter](#)
- Share the visit on Social Media (with permission)
 - [SCAN's Social Media and Advocacy Presentation](#)
 - [Social Media Tips](#)
- Have a debrief with others in your program about the visit.
- Remind others in your program about the importance of advocacy - start an ongoing 'advocacy focus' with your team (share articles, resources, etc.).
- Set a reminder for yourself to follow up with the legislator to continue the relationship.
- Look into their coffee hours or other opportunities to connect on a more regular basis.

Planning Timeline:

- ❑ 1-3 Months Out: Invite policymaker
- ❑ 3 Weeks Out: Invite parents, community members, and school officials
- ❑ 2 Weeks Out: Develop schedule for the day; identify roles; invite the media
- ❑ 1 Week Out: Finalize program agenda
- ❑ 3 Days Out: Call the policymaker's office to confirm visit and send out reminders to the parents, community members and any others invited.

Contingency: Planning a Virtual Visit:

While an in-person site visit may not be possible, meaningful connections and conversations can still be accomplished through a virtual visit. Lawmakers may have more availability to schedule a virtual visit as well!

Use a video software that you are comfortable with and decide how your tour will need to be modified. The tip sheets below will support you with this contingency.

- Using Google Meet ([PDF](#)) ([YouTube Tutorial](#)--11:32)
- Using Zoom: [Video tutorials](#)

Full List of Resources: [Lawmaker Site Visit Resources](#)

Developed by the Michigan AEYC Advocacy Committee, 2020

Contact: advocacy@miaeyc.org