

# Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services

## Legislative Advocacy Guide



*The Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services is a nonprofit member-driven organization devoted to private agencies that provide direct services to children and families affected by abuse and neglect in Texas.*

*Our mission is to strengthen and continuously improve the services, practices, and care for at-risk children, youth, and families. We achieve this mission through research and education, collaboration, and advocacy.*

**TACFS ~ 409 West 13th Street, Austin, Texas 78701 ~ (512) 892-2683 ~ [www.tacfs.org](http://www.tacfs.org)**



# Texas Legislature Online (TLO)

www.capitol.state.tx.us

**My TLO**  
Track bills by bill number or by specific subject. Set up email alerts for notification of bill actions.

**Committees**  
Search for committee hearings by date and by committee. See committee membership.

**Who Represents Me?**  
Find who represents your organization in the legislature.

**Legislative Activity**  
Watch public hearings in progress online, or search and watch archived hearings.

**Legislative Process**  
Learn how a bill becomes law, how to follow a bill, and session deadline dates.

## Legislative Addressing Guide

When writing to legislators, use the following format:

### Governor:

The Honorable Greg Abbott  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

Dear Governor Abbott,

### Lieutenant Governor:

The Honorable Dan Patrick  
Capitol Station  
P.O. Box 12068  
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Lt. Governor Patrick,

### Speaker of the House:

The Honorable Joe Straus  
Speaker of the House  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

Dear Speaker Straus,

### State Senator:

The Honorable (full name)  
Texas Senate  
Capitol Station  
P.O. Box 12068  
Austin, Texas 78711

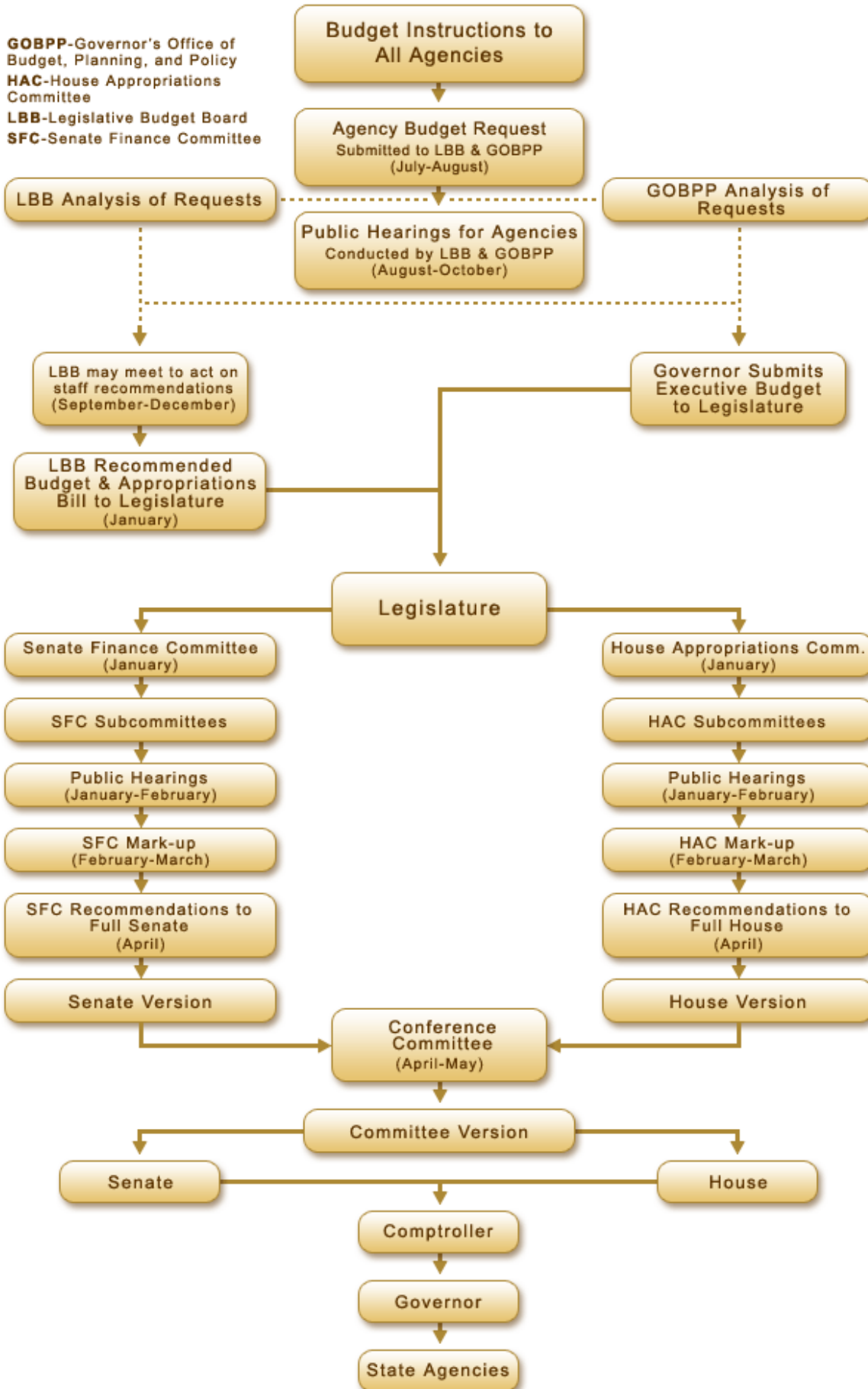
Dear Senator (last name),

### State Representative:

The Honorable (full name)  
Texas House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

Dear Representative (last name),

# Texas Budget Process



House and Senate file a version of the general appropriations bill.

- ◆ *Initial budget based on the Comptroller's general revenue estimate.*
- ◆ *Revenue generally revised upward toward the end of the session.*

Public hearings scheduled by Senate Finance and House Appropriations.

- ◆ *Testimony provided by state agencies and public.*

Select Committee members begin "markup" process to agree on funding per agency.

- ◆ *Standing subcommittee in the House and workgroup in the Senate.*
- ◆ *Advocacy targets these members and state leaders to ensure foster care rate increase is marked up in at least one version of the budget.*

Markup goes to full Committee to vote out.

Budget can be amended on the floor by both chambers.

Conference Committee appointed to resolve areas of disagreement.

- ◆ *Items same in both bills with identical funding – no change*
- ◆ *In both bills with different funding levels – amount of funding decided in conference*
- ◆ *Only in House or Senate budget – can be included or excluded*
- ◆ *Items not included in either version cannot be added*

Each chamber approves, Comptroller certifies, Governor has line item veto power.

# Ten Ways to Be an Effective Legislative Advocate

Source: Modified from Snapper Carr, Legislative Consultant, Hillco Partners

## Have A Game Plan

- ◆ Get connected with Alliance members in your legislative district. Enlist board members with political connections.
- ◆ Have a concise and consistent message among the Alliance members.
- ◆ Is the local advocacy group in sync with the state/national group? If not, are you able to distinguish how your local needs are different?

## Develop Your Relationships Early

- ◆ Get to know the legislative staff person who works on your issues.
- ◆ Set up face-to-face meetings before the hectic nature of session kicks in.
- ◆ Invite legislative members to see your work in action.
- ◆ Honor legislators by asking them to contribute to your newsletter, or by recognizing them with an award if appropriate.

## Produce Written Communications

- ◆ Handouts and informational pieces should be short and to the point.
- ◆ Make sure any fact sheets include references.
- ◆ Offer to send the materials electronically.
- ◆ Letter writing campaigns should be personalized and should include the address of the sender.
- ◆ Make sure letters come from constituents!

## Make Yourself and Your Organization a Resource

- ◆ During the development of your relationships with members, provide them with all your contact information, and make the offer to serve as a resource.
- ◆ Offer to review legislation before it is filed.
- ◆ Offer to provide assistance in securing witnesses.
- ◆ Offer data and stories unique to legislators' districts.
- ◆ Offer solutions where there are problems.

## Be Able to Respond Quickly

- ◆ Things can move very quickly during session!
- ◆ If you don't know the answer, say you'll follow up.
- ◆ No matter what, don't ever lie or share information that you are not certain is accurate.
- ◆ Always follow up with a thank you.

## Personalize Your Communication

- ◆ Whenever possible, include stories and data from the legislator's district to make a statewide issue meaningful at the local level.
- ◆ Avoid form letters.
- ◆ Include all necessary information so that the legislator or the staff person can follow up as needed.

## Keep Your Organization Informed

- ◆ Keep other individuals in your group informed of your communication with legislators, both good and bad.
- ◆ This sharing of information will allow organizations and individuals the opportunity to adjust their message and strategy as needed.

## Recognize Political Realities

- ◆ Not everyone will agree with you, but as the saying goes, "Today's opponents are tomorrow's supporters!"
- ◆ Find common ground wherever you can, recognizing that this is an issue that affects all of us.
- ◆ Adjust your language where necessary.

## Don't Be Afraid to Ask

- ◆ ASK for action!
- ◆ Don't be afraid to ask a legislator to either "please support or please oppose" a specific bill or proposals.
- ◆ Letter writing, phone calls, briefings, etc. should always include a plainly-worded and specific ask where necessary.

## Get Familiar with the Legislative Process

- ◆ Who represents me?
- ◆ Legislative dates and process
- ◆ Follow the status of a bill
- ◆ Receive committee alerts
- ◆ Look up existing Texas statutes

## Advocacy Resources

### State Government Sites

#### **Texas Legislature Online**

<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/>

#### **Texas House Texas House of Representatives**

<http://www.house.state.tx.us/>

#### **Texas Senate Texas Senate**

<http://www.senate.state.tx.us/>

#### **Texas House Committee Hearing Schedules**

<http://www.house.state.tx.us/committees/cmteschd.php>

#### **Texas Senate Committee Hearing Schedules**

<http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/Senate/Events.htm>

#### **Office of the Governor**

<http://www.governor.state.tx.us/>

#### **Legislative Budget Board**

<http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/>

#### **Sunset Commission Reports**

##### ◆ **Department of Family and Protective Services**

<https://www.sunset.texas.gov/reviews-and-reports/agencies/department-family-and-protective-services-dfps>

##### ◆ **Health and Human Services Commission**

<https://www.sunset.texas.gov/reviews-and-reports/agencies/health-and-human-services-commission-hhsc>

### Texas State Agencies

#### **Health and Human Services Commission**

<http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/>

#### **Department of Family and Protective Services**

<http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/>

##### ◆ **The Stephen Group Report**

<http://www.stephengroupinc.com/engagements/tx-department-of-family-and-protective-services>

### Federal Government Sites

#### **House of Representatives**

<http://www.house.gov/>

#### **U.S. Senate**

<http://www.senate.gov/>

#### **Congressional Representatives**

<http://www.congress.org/congressorg/home/>

#### **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

<http://www.hhs.gov/>

#### **Governmental Research Association**

<http://www.graonline.org/>