



Maine Women's Policy Center

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

P.O. Box 85
Hallowell, Maine 04347
207.622.0851
Fax 207.621.2551
info@mainewomen.org
www.mainewomen.org

Girls' Day at the State House

Action Guide

*"The future belongs to those who believe
in the beauty of their dreams."*

Eleanor Roosevelt, U.S. social reformer and First Lady

March 2009

The Maine Women’s Policy Center was founded in 1990 and shares the mission of its sister organization, the Maine Women’s Lobby, to increase economic, social, and political opportunities for women and girls through public policy and leadership development.

The *Maine Women’s Policy Center* conducts on public outreach, education, and research in the following areas: 1) economic security; 2) access to quality health care, including reproductive health services; 3) civil rights; and, 4) freedom from violence.

The *Maine Women’s Policy Center* seeks to increase women’s participation in government and to bring insightful research and women’s voices to the search for solutions to biases and barriers that still exist against women in our society.

Staff

Sarah Standiford, Executive Director
Laura Harper, Director of Public Policy
Bonnie Buckmore, Development & Administrative Manager
Charlotte Warren, Outreach & Communications Manager
Kim Fleming, Program Assistant

Board of Directors

Kimm Collins, Chair
Kim Simmons, Vice-chair
Tabitha Woodbury, Treasurer
M. Katherine Lynch, Secretary
Peaches Bass
Pamela Boivin
Sandy Butler
Betsy Clemens Saltonstall
Maria Fox
LeAnn Greenleaf
Jean Principe

This guide is adapted from the “Take Action: Girls’ Pipeline to Power”
by the Patriots’ Trail Girl Scout Council, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>NEEDED... WOMEN IN POLITICS</u> <i>What is the status of women in politics around the nation and in Maine?</i>	page 4
<u>HOW CAN MAINE GIRLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?</u> <i>Why are girls' voices important? Do girls have a role in politics? How the Girls' Day Action Guide can help you</i>	page 4
<u>WHAT IS YOUR POLITICAL I.Q.?</u> <i>Fun games and quizzes that test your political knowledge</i>	page 5
<u>LEADING THE WAY AND BLAZING TRAILS</u> MARGARET CHASE SMITH: <i>The biography of a Maine woman who led the way</i> LEADERSHIP QUALITIES: <i>What are some qualities of effective leadership? How can you be a leader?</i>	page 7
<u>A LESSON IN MAINE POLITICS</u> DEFINITIONS: <i>Politics and what that means in a democracy</i> MAINE STATE GOVERNMENT: <i>The branches and responsibilities of the Maine State government</i> MAINE'S PATH OF LEGISLATION: <i>How a bill gets passed in the state of Maine</i>	page 8
<u>INFLUENCING THE OUTCOME:</u> <u>COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR</u> YOUR VOICE, YOUR POWER: <i>A guide to meeting and communicating with your local and national representatives</i>	page 11
<u>PROMOTING YOUR CAUSE</u> <i>Getting people to know about and support an issue that is important to you</i>	page 15
<u>POLITICAL ACTIVISM</u> CONCLUSION: <i>Your next steps toward future political involvement and leadership</i>	page 15
<u>RESOURCES: WEBSITES</u> <i>The tools needed for continuing education and informed political involvement</i>	page 16

NEEDED: WOMEN IN POLITICS

“There will never be complete equality until women themselves help to make the laws and elect lawmakers.”

- Susan B. Anthony, pioneer in the U.S. Women’s Suffrage Movement

In the year 2009:

- ❑ 18 women serve as leaders of 33 countries (Queen Elizabeth of England is also queen of 15 other countries!) out of the 192 nations recognized by the United Nations
- ❑ President Barack Obama has appointed 3 women to his cabinet (Janet Napolitano as Secretary of Homeland Security, Hilary Rodham Clinton as Secretary of State, and Hilda Solis as Secretary of Labor), and 3 women to other key positions (Susan Rice as UN Ambassador, Lisa Jackson as EPA Administrator, and Valerie Jarrett as Senior White House Advisor).
- ❑ Women make up:
 - 17% of the United States Senate
 - 17% of the United States House of Representatives
 - 11.1% of the United States Supreme Court
 - 19% of state governors
 - 12% of big city mayors (out of biggest 50 US cities)

Sources: www.wikipedia.org, www.usa.gov, www.infoplease.com

In the State of Maine in 2009, women make up:

- ❑ 22.9% of the Maine State Senate
- ❑ 31.1% of the Maine State House of Representatives
- ❑ 29.7% of the Maine State Legislature
- ❑ The Governor is the only executive elected statewide, and a woman has never served as Governor.

Source: www.maine.gov

HOW CAN MAINE GIRLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” - Margaret Mead, anthropologist

Why care about women in politics? Did you know that our government continually makes decisions on laws and policies that affect your daily life in both big and small ways? Everything you do is shaped in some way by our government: whether you’re eating a meal; studying in class; or visiting the doctor.

Girls *must* get involved to ensure the important decisions made by the government – the laws and policies that affect you – are in your best interest. You have a unique perspective on these issues. That perspective matters and must be voiced so that you can have an impact on your life and future.

Girls' Day at the State House is a great way to get started. But, what if you don't want to stop after only one day? **The Girls' Day Action Guide** will help you further develop your leadership skills and learn about Maine's system of government so that you can participate. Though you may not be old enough to vote, the **Action Guide** can help you make your voice heard by political leaders and help you become an activist. And maybe someday *you'll* get the chance to represent Maine girls and women in the halls of the State House, in the U.S. Congress, or even the White House.

The **Girls' Day Action Guide** was created to help you assert the political power that you *already have* by helping you to:

- ❑ Become an informed, active citizen by learning about the government and the political process;
- ❑ Develop skills that will help you become a leader in your communities, schools, and in politics; and,
- ❑ Get involved and speak out on issues that matter to you and your community.

Girls can have an impact. The **Girls' Day Action Guide** is here to inspire you and provide you with the information to claim your voice and power through the political process.

WHAT IS YOUR POLITICAL I.Q.?

“Something which we think is impossible now is not impossible in another decade.”

- **Constance Baker Motley** (first black woman in the U.S. to become a federal judge)

Some “Maine” basics:

1. What are the three branches of the federal government?
2. Who represents you in the Maine Senate?
3. Who represents you in the Maine House of Representatives?
4. How old do you need to be to vote?
5. Who represents you in the U.S. Congress?
6. Where is the Maine State House (state capitol)? Have you been there?
7. How many women are in the Governor's Cabinet? Who are they?



Match the following Maine women to their political achievements:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Beverly C. Daggett | 4. Olympia J. Snowe |
| 2. Margaret Chase Smith | 5. Susan Collins |
| 3. Libby Mitchell | 6. Leigh I. Saufley |

- a. Maine's first woman President of the Senate
- b. Maine's first woman Speaker of the House of Representatives
- c. First Maine woman to serve in U.S. Congress; First woman in the nation elected to both houses of U.S. Congress; First woman in the nation to run for President from a majority party

- d. Maine's first woman Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court
- e. First woman to run for Maine Governor from a majority party; U.S. Senator
- f. First woman in the nation to serve in both houses of a state legislature *and* both houses of U.S. Congress; U.S. Senator

Answers to Maine basics

1) Executive, Legislative and Judicial; 2 & 3) Find out at <http://janus.state.me.us/house/townlist.htm>; 4) 18 years old. Even if you're only 17, you can still register to vote if you'll be 18 by Election Day; 5) Representatives Michael Michaud or Chellie Pingree, and Senators Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe; 6) Augusta; 7) Seven: Brenda Harvey, Dale McCormick, Rebecca Wyke, Susan Gendron, Martha Freeman, Anne Jordan, and Laura Fortman (the former Executive Director of the Maine Women's Policy Center).

Answers to matching: 1-a; 2-c; 3-b; 4-f; 5-e; 6-d

What is Your Activism Level?

Read each statement and check the box that best describes your activities.

	Never	Sometimes	Often
• Vote in a school election	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Run for a school office or volunteer to serve on a school committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do volunteer work in your community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Design your own community change project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Give a speech, make a phone call, or write a letter to someone in your school, community, or state to support or oppose an issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Read the newspaper, watch the news on TV, or read the news on the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Start a petition at your school, club, community, or in your faith community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Encourage your parents or other adults to vote in an election	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Scoring



Give yourself 3 points for every “Often” response, 2 points for every “Sometimes” response, and 0 points for every “Never” response.

0 – 10 points: Your activism level is a little low - but don’t worry, keep reading.

11 – 20 points: You have taken your first steps towards activism and future political involvement.

21 – 30 points: Congratulations! You’re active and involved.

(Adapted from What Do You Stand For? A Kid’s Guide to Building Character, by Barbara A. Lewis and Pamela Espeland. Free Spirit Publishing, Inc., Minneapolis, 1998)

LEADING THE WAY AND BLAZING TRAILS

“... Women will be fully empowered only through the use of political power: the power to change the law, to challenge the status quo, and to right the wrongs that have affected us through informed voting, strong issue advocacy, and the power of leadership.”

- YWCA USA



What’s your dream for the future of our country? Leaders usually have a vision and goals they’ve set along the way to achieve their dreams. Leaders persuade others to share their vision and to make it happen. Let’s read about a very influential woman leader from Maine:

MARGARET CHASE SMITH (1897-1995) has been called one of the most influential women in Maine. Smith left behind a legacy of firsts that blazed a trail for other women to follow, proving that women have the power to greatly influence change. Mainers will never forget her impressive career that covered three decades of steady service in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Throughout all of her years of leadership, she demonstrated a firm commitment to her constituents (the people of Maine) and never once wavered from her belief that women hold the keys to their own freedom, in the power of their conscience - to vote it, to speak it, to achieve it.

Margaret Chase Smith was a Maine woman with strong beliefs, the courage to voice those beliefs, and a vision for what she wanted to achieve - all elements of great leadership. How can you be a leader too?

Qualities of an Effective Leader

Know Where You Stand — Think about your core values and have the “courage of your convictions.” Know where you can and can’t compromise. Be true to yourself.

Create a Network of Supporters — Gather support from others who believe in what you're doing - *no one* succeeds without help.

Establish Goals and an Action Plan — Provide direction for yourself and others. All leaders set goals - that's how political leaders make progress on issues that affect us. Create a plan with action steps for accomplishing your goals.

Communicate — Speak up; your voice is your only “tool.” Be a respectful listener with others and be a mindful speaker when communicating your beliefs.

Champion Change and Innovation — Challenge the status quo (the way things are usually done). Be creative, have conviction, and stand up for what you believe in, even if others may not agree.

How to Improve Your Leadership Qualities

✓ Seek out more experienced mentors or role models. These people can offer you experienced advice and guidance to help you succeed. Ask your teachers, parents, clergy, coaches, camp counselors, family, and friends to help you find a way to expand your leadership potential.

✓ Watch others lead. Ask women in leadership roles in state or local government or business, religious or civic organizations if you can spend a day “job shadowing” with them.

✓ If possible, attend classes, workshops, leadership conferences, or other trainings in order to learn more. Get information about these programs from your school or find a girl-serving organization in your local community – check the back of this guide for some resources.

✓ Educate yourself. Read books on women leaders whose accomplishments inspire you. These books will help you develop your own leadership skills. Apply these new skills to one of your projects.

✓ Sharpen your leadership skills. Take on a leadership role in the community or school. Run for class or club officer, join a peer leader group, tutor young children, or organize a public information campaign on an issue that is important to you.

A LESSON IN MAINE POLITICS

So now you know about the imbalance in political representation between men and women, the significance of your voice in politics, and the importance of leadership skills. Before we get into what *you* can do to be politically active, let's have a little “lesson in Maine politics” so that you know exactly what to expect.

THE BASICS

We live in a democratic society. Instead of one person making all the rules, we elect people to represent our views in government. Because *everyone's* view is important, the political process can be very complicated.

There are many official definitions of the word “politics.” They can get pretty confusing, so we put together our own definition of “politics” for the purposes of this guide:

Politics is the art of winning support for, or influencing others to support, your ideas and goals. Politicians succeed by getting others to see their point of view by persuading and negotiating to move issues forward. Politics involves several groups of opposing forces that push and pull and battle it out until a candidate is elected or legislation is passed.

You’ve probably heard people say that it takes forever for government to get anything done. Well, they are right - almost. When there are many individual citizens, political parties, and specific groups of people involved in an issue, it takes a lot of compromise and a long time for change to occur. Let’s see how this works in the Maine State government.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE MAINE STATE GOVERNMENT

Maine’s government system is modeled on the federal Government structure with three equal branches - the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. The three branches have different functions, known as the **separation of powers**. The separation of powers provides for a system of **checks and balances**, which means that each branch has a means to invalidate (overturn) the actions of other branches. This is to make sure that *one* person or *one* branch doesn’t get too powerful.

The **Executive Branch** is made up of the Governor and the 17 departments of the Maine State government. According to the Maine Constitution, the Governor can serve for a total of eight years, or two 4-year terms.

The Governor serves as the Commander-in-Chief of the Maine State Army and Navy; appoints all judicial officers; recommends legislation and signs it into law or vetoes it so that it doesn’t become law; and, ensures that the laws passed by the Legislative Branch are enforced.

The **Legislative Branch**, also known as the Maine Legislature, is made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate. This branch is responsible for enacting legislation (making laws). The State is divided into both Senatorial districts and districts for the House of Representatives – districts are like a map that determines which neighborhoods are represented by which legislator.

- The House has 151 members who are elected every two years. There are 151 House districts, all with an equal population. This means that each representative represents approximately 7,500 people. The House also includes two non-voting members representing the Penobscot Nation and the Passamaquoddy Tribe.
- The Senate has 35 members who are elected every two years. Since there are only 35 Senatorial districts, each Senator represents a larger number of people than do the Representatives, approximately 35,000 in each Senate district.

The **Judicial Branch** is responsible for interpreting the laws (deciding if a law has been broken or not) and is headed by the Supreme Judicial Court. All judicial officers are appointed by the Governor and serve a term of seven years. The Supreme Court Chief Justice is a woman, the Honorable Leigh I. Saufley.

Now that you understand the roles of each branch of the Maine State government, let's see how they work when a law is created. Let's say you and your friends want the government to pass legislation that gives the schools more money to pay for after-school programs – here's the path the legislation would take:

MAINE'S PATH OF LEGISLATION



Step 1: *Helping your legislator develop an idea*

A legislator decides to sponsor a bill at the suggestion of a constituent (those people he/she represents from their district - that's *you*), interest group (people organized around issues they care about), public official, or the Governor. In this case, your group writes a letter, e-mails, calls, or meets with the Representative or Senator from your district about the need for more funding for after-school programs.

If Senator Susan Smith agrees with you that more funding is needed and agrees to sponsor a bill, the next step is...

Step 2: *Senator Smith introduces the bill*

Senator Smith may ask other legislators in either chamber (the House or the Senate) to sponsor the bill with her. The bill is given a number and is printed.

Step 3: *The bill is referred to a committee*

The bill is referred to the committee that deals with funding for after-school programs. The committee is made up of three Senators and ten Representatives. The committee conducts a public hearing to listen to testimony supporting or opposing the bill from legislators, such as Senator Smith, or citizens who wish to speak (another opportunity for *your* group to speak out). The committee will then have a work session to amend (edit) the bill if necessary. Then the committee votes on whether to recommend the bill (support it or not support it).

Step 4: *Debating the bill*

The bill is now sent back to the House or the Senate, depending on who introduced it (in this case, the Senate), so that each legislator now has the opportunity to decide whether to vote for or against the bill by debating the pros and the cons of the bill. They also have the chance to propose their own amendments to the bill. When the Senate is done debating the bill, the bill is sent to the House to be debated there.

Step 5: *The final vote*

This bill will go back to both chambers for final approval. The members of the House and Senate vote on whether to approve or reject the bill. The bill must pass both bodies in identical form in order to receive final legislative approval.

Step 6: *The Governor's stamp of approval*

If the bill passes in both chambers (enactment), it is sent to the Governor who will either sign it into law or veto it (reject it). If the Governor vetoes the bill, the Legislature can override the veto with a 2/3 majority vote in favor of the bill. When the Legislature isn't in session, the Governor can also "pocket veto" the bill by simply not signing it.



INFLUENCING THE OUTCOME: COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

Even if you aren't old enough to vote or run for office, you can still become involved in the political process. We live in a representative government where legislators are in office to represent the collective voices of their constituents. So, one way to ensure your own involvement is to *always* be outspoken on issues that are important to you. To be an activist means to become active on behalf of a cause, issue, or person. If you do this, you will increase the control you have on your life and your future. Legislators cannot fairly represent your views if they do not hear from you. Your voice IS your power.

You may be asking yourself, "Well sure, this all sounds good, but how do I get my Representative or Senator to listen to me on a particular issue?" True - making your voice heard takes a little effort and some basic knowledge. That's why the **Girls' Day Action Guide** was created. So how do we get started?

Who is My Legislator?

One of the first steps is knowing who represents you. If you don't know which legislators represent you in the Maine Legislature, don't panic. The State of Maine website has a link to the State of Maine government. Go to www.maine.gov/portal/government/legislature.html, click on "find your legislators," and there will be an option to search for your legislators by the town you live in. If you do not have access to a computer, you can simply call your town office and ask for the names and contact information of your legislators – it's as simple as that.

The Maine delegates who represent you in the U.S. Congress (also known as the Maine Congressional Delegation) are Congressmen Chellie Pingree or Michael Michaud and Senators Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins. Their contact information is listed below.

Contact Information for Chellie Pingree

Portland office: 1-207-774-5019

Washington, DC office: 1-202-225-6116

<http://pingree.house.gov>

Contact Information for Michael Michaud

Bangor office: 1-207-942-6935

Washington, DC office: 1-202-225-6306

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

Contact Information for Olympia Snowe

Toll free in Maine: 1-800-432-1599

Washington, DC office: 1-202-224-5344

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

Contact Information for Susan Collins

Bangor office: 1-207-945-0417

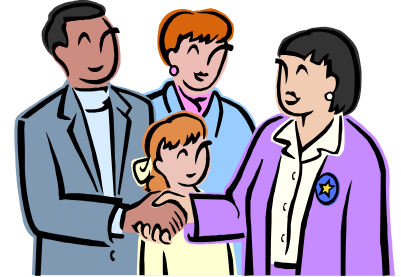
Washington, DC office: 1-202-224-2523

<http://collins.senate.gov>

Representatives and Senators don't have regular email addresses anymore; instead, find the "email" link on their contact page, and fill out the form that comes up. Also, all four of these elected officials have more than one office in Maine. To find out which one is nearest to you, visit their websites and click on their contact link.

Meeting Your Legislators Face-to-Face

So maybe you think that only lobbyists that work for big corporations or adults can meet with their legislators. Not true! In fact, often young people can make a huge impression by caring about issues that affect them and can provide the legislator with a unique first-hand perspective of what's going on in their school or community.



Meeting with your legislators face-to-face is one of the best ways to let them know about issues that you care about. You can leave a message for them at the State House: Senate – 1-800-423-6900, House – 1-800-423-2900. You can also get a group of concerned citizens together and make an appointment to meet with your legislator.

While it is more difficult to meet with the Maine Congressional Delegation who spend most of their time in Washington, D.C., they do have district offices in Maine. The staff members (legislative assistants) who work in these offices help constituents with problems, communicate constituent views on legislation to the legislator, and act as the legislator's spokesperson at meetings.

Here are some tips for meeting with your legislator:

- Be prepared – know your legislator's voting record on the issue that you're coming to discuss or find articles about them online;
- Stick together – bring a group of 2-4 people with you to talk with the legislator;
- Know what you're going to say – prepare some talking points about the issue and know what you're going to ask the legislator;
- Know who's going to say what – figure out who will be addressing what points before you get there so that your meeting runs smoothly and clearly; and,
- Bring info with you – while you'll only have a brief time with your legislator or their assistant, you can leave information with them (be sure to include your contact information on the materials). It's also a good idea to bring photographs or other visual displays to help make your point.

But what do I say? See below for some ideas on how to structure your visit:

- Introduce yourself, including your district/school and the club or organization that you're representing.
- Explain what issue you're there to discuss and find out if the legislator is familiar with the issue and where your legislator stands on the issue.

- Tell where you stand and why. Be prepared with examples/facts to support your view.
- Be sure to share a personal story or experience to better illustrate your point of view. For example, if you are there to talk about increasing after-school funding, share a story about how the program you participate in has made a difference in your life.
- Relay what you're hoping the legislator will do after your meeting (co-sponsor legislation, support/oppose it).
- Ask your legislator directly if he/she will support your cause or policy. Thank them.
- Restate your position and discuss next steps and when you will contact them again to follow-up on progress.
- Get the contact person's card so you have their direct phone number or e-mail address.
- Write down the notes from your meeting as soon as possible so that you have a good account of what happened.
- Send a thank you note that includes a reminder of what took place and any action steps that you agreed upon.
- Share your progress with your friends and supporters and even the press!

Adapted in part from "Talking to your Elected Representatives (Lobbying)" from www.campusactivism.org



Telephone Calls to Your Legislators

- Ask to speak directly with your legislator or his/her aide that deals with the issue that you are concerned about.
- State your name and where you are from.
- State the reason for your call.
- Ask where your legislator stands on the issue (if you don't already know).
- Always express your thanks if the legislator supports your view.
- Politely and briefly explain your view. Support your case with statistics or a compelling personal story.
- If your legislator doesn't agree with you or is undecided, ask why.
- End your conversation by thanking your legislator for considering your position, even if the call didn't go as well as you expected.

Communicating with Your Legislator by E-mail

Public officials are beginning to recognize that the Internet is a great tool for reaching their constituents. Many have home pages online for communicating the latest information on legislation and for displaying personal and contact information about themselves. If you are going to share your views by e-mailing your legislator, follow the same guidelines as writing a letter. You can also use your computer to become more politically active by accessing websites with important information. When researching information on the Internet, make sure the information you're getting is objective (gives only the facts). Read carefully to determine whether it is biased toward a certain point of view (doesn't provide all the facts but still makes a strong claim one way or the other).



When writing to your state or federal legislators, you will need to address your letters like this:

For Your State Representative:

The Honorable (First Name)(Last Name)
House of Representatives
2 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0002

Dear Representative (Last Name):

For Your U.S. Representative:

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
1037 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

OR

The Honorable Michael Michaud
1724 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative (Last Name):

For Your State Senator:

The Honorable (First Name)(Last Name)
Senate of Maine
3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0003

Dear Senator (Last Name):

For Your U.S. Senators:

The Honorable Susan Collins
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

OR

The Honorable Olympia Snowe
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (Last Name):

Some Tips

1. Remember to put your name and mailing address in the upper left-hand corner of the envelope. Many offices don't open mail that doesn't include a return address.
2. Be sure to include your name, address, and phone number *in* the letter. This will ensure that the legislator can get back to you, even if the envelope is lost.
3. Give your legislator as much information about the bill as possible (the number and title of the bill and where it is in the legislative process if you know).
4. State the intent of your letter immediately. Clearly and briefly (one page is best) state your reason for supporting or opposing the bill. Include any statistics or facts you know on how the legislation will affect a particular population.
5. Identify yourself as a constituent and give a little background about yourself. Explain why the bill is important to *you* and how it will affect you and others like you.
6. End by thanking them for considering your views.
7. Follow up with a thank you note or telephone call if they provide the requested support.
8. If you do not receive acknowledgement of your letter within a week, write or call again until you do.

PROMOTING YOUR CAUSE

So, now that you have your legislators listening to your concerns, what's next? As you know from the discussion on leadership, you must gather support from others who believe in what you're doing because *no one* succeeds without help. How do you get others to feel strongly about an issue that is important to you? Activism on your issue is only as successful as the number of people who know about it. You need to develop a plan to promote your cause. Here are some ideas:



- Decide what you want to communicate. You need a clear, focused core message and supporting facts. Stories people can tell about personal experiences are very effective.
- Develop creative publicity - signs, posters, a web site, a blog, etc. with a simple slogan that communicates your message. Include the information you think is most important and persuasive. Hang the posters and signs in public buildings. E-mail your web site or blog link to friends and family.
- Hold forums or public discussions on the issue. Invite politicians, community leaders, citizen groups, community organizations, and the public.
- Speak in public about the issue.
- Use your local newspapers to submit letters to the editor. One of the most popular, simple, and effective ways to communicate your message to the public is through your local newspapers.

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

1. Find out the guidelines and rules for letters to the editor. Most papers set a 100 to 200-word limit for letters. Stick to the word limit so that you, rather than an editor, are in control of what gets “cut out” from your letter.
2. Put your name, home address, and phone number at the top of the letter and sign it at the bottom. Send letters by e-mail, fax, or regular mail.
3. Write in short paragraphs and avoid personal attacks.
4. Write as if the readers know nothing about your topic. Be clear and concise. Have a focused message and supporting facts with the most important information you can find.

POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Now you have an increased understanding of leadership, the world of politics, and the know-how to make your voice heard. You are an informed citizen. What are you going to do with these new tools? Get involved in anything that interests or inspires you. Speak out about and organize around social injustice. Make your mark on the political system right now and have a voice in crucial decisions. Your voice is all you need to be a political activist and affect change. **You're never too young to begin.**

Attend a meeting where policy decisions are made - a school committee, city council, or legislative session. Choose an issue addressed by one of these groups and follow its progress through the political process.

Research an issue that is important to you. Make sure you get information from several different sources before choosing a side. Then:

- ❑ Write an article about the issue for your school newspaper.
- ❑ Write a letter to the editor about the issue in your local newspaper.
- ❑ Testify before a legislative committee to advocate for the issue.
- ❑ Launch a public education campaign about the issue by creating and distributing publicity. For example, hand out informational brochures in your school/community, make posters to promote the issue and hang them in your school/community, or set up a web site or blog.
- ❑ Write to your legislator and ask him/her to vote favorably on legislation that deals with the issue that is important to you.

Research an election that is important to you. Call the campaign offices and volunteer for them by stuffing envelopes, handing out flyers, posting signs, or answering telephones. Even though you are not old enough to vote, you can still get involved in the voting process by getting in touch with your town clerk and sponsoring a voter registration drive in your community; organizing transportation for people who can't get to the polls on Election Day; encouraging anyone you know who is 18 or older to vote; and, working at your local polling place.



Resources: Web sites

WOMEN IN POLITICS

Leadership America

www.leadershipamerica.com

Organization that recognizes and connects women to increase their global impact

Living the Legacy: The Women's Rights Movement 1848-1999

www.legacy98.org

Ms. Foundation for Women

www.ms.foundation.org

National Women's Hall of Fame

www.greatwomen.org

National Women's Political Caucus

www.nwpc.org

Rutgers University Center for American Women and Politics

www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cawp

Women in the U.S. House of Representatives

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

Women in the U.S. Senate

http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/women_senators.htm

VOTING AND ACTIVISM

Free Child Project

<http://freechild.org/wopo.htm>

Encourages women to use their power

Girls Action Media

<http://www.beyondmedia.org/gam.html>

Kids Voting USA

www.kidsvotingusa.org

Involves young people in the election process

Project Vote-Smart
www.vote-smart.org

League of Women Voters
www.lwv.org
Encourages informed participation by all citizens

*National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People*
www.naACP.org
Ensures equality for minority groups

Rock the Vote
<http://www.rockthevote.org/>
Helps young people utilize their ability to affect change
in the civic and political lives of their communities.

Vote, Run, Lead
www.voterunlead.org
Activates young women to engage in political
participation.

GOVERNMENT

State of Maine Government
[http://www.maine.gov/portal/government/
index.html](http://www.maine.gov/portal/government/index.html)
Links to the Governor's, House of
Representatives, and the Senate websites

President of the United States
www.whitehouse.gov

U.S. Senate
www.senate.gov

U.S. House of Representatives
www.house.gov

POLITICAL PARTIES

Democratic Party
www.democrats.org

Green Party
<http://www.greenpartyus.org/>

Reform Party
<http://www.reformparty.org/>

Republican Party
www.rnc.org

CIVIC AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

A Rising Tide
www.arisingtidemaine.com
A Maine-based civic leadership training institute for
young people

Close-Up Foundation
www.closeup.org

Presidential Classroom
www.presidentialclassroom.org

White House Project
www.thewhitehouseproject.org

SOCIAL CHANGE GRANTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Do Something
www.dosomething.org
Ten young people from all over the United States receive
\$500 for creative proposals to solve local problems.

National Crime Prevention Council
www.ncpc.org
One hundred grants of up to \$500 will be awarded to
support service-learning projects.

Youth Service America
www.ysa.org
A resource center that partners with thousands of
organizations.

Youth Venture
www.youthventure.org
Empowers young people by providing them all the tools
to create civic-minded organizations.

LOCAL CURRENT EVENTS/NEWS

Bangor Daily News Online
<http://www.bangornews.com/>

Lewiston Sun Journal Online
<http://www.sunjournal.com/>

MaineToday.com

<http://www.maintoday.com/>

Provides online links to the Portland Press

Herald, the Kennebec Journal, and the Morning Sentinel

NATIONAL CURRENT EVENTS

Boston Globe

www.boston.com/news/globe

CNN

www.cnn.com/

News site with current events from
around the world

C-Span

www.c-span.org

Updates on Congressional bills
and elections

Independent Media Center

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

New York Times

www.nytimes.com

The Nation

<http://www.thenation.com/>

Time Daily – Web Only news

<http://www.time.com/time/>

General news published by Time
Daily and link to Kids' Time

U.S. News Online

www.usnews.com

Online edition of magazine

Sources: Various materials and publications of the Maine Women's Policy Center.

Lewis, Barbara A. and Pamela Espeland, ed. What Do You Stand For? A Kid's Guide to Building Character. Minneapolis: Free Spirit, 1998.

MacCrae, Melissa. It Takes a Woman: Women Shaping Public Policy. Brewer: Goddess, 1999.

Take Action: Girls' Pipeline to Power. Boston: Patriots Trail Girl Scout Council, Inc., 2000.