



The Leadership
Conference
Education Fund

GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNS & ADVOCACY

a toolkit to help you make change happen



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The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States. The Leadership Conference works toward an America as good as its ideals.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund is a 501(c)(3) organization that builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States.

Access this material online at [http://www.civilrights.org/
action_center/toolkit](http://www.civilrights.org/action_center/toolkit).



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Dear Friend:

This toolkit was created with you in mind. Its purpose is to educate, equip, encourage, and empower you to make change.

Our goal is to provide you with the basic structure and strategies needed to plan and carry out an effective grassroots public education or advocacy campaign. It's possible to write an entire book on each of the areas covered in this toolkit – in fact, many have been written. But you don't have to read half a dozen books to put together a strong campaign.

What you need to do is establish your goals, create a strategy, make a step-by-step plan, and mobilize the people, partners, and resources to make it all achievable. This toolkit is meant to be a concise guide to accomplishing that. And we include plenty of suggested resources if you want more in-depth information.

The Leadership Conference and The Education Fund provide leadership and coordination to coalition efforts and support the work of national and local partners by providing strategic and technical assistance, preparing materials, offering training, and identifying resources to support coalition efforts. Information on training for grassroots advocacy is provided by The Leadership Conference; information relating to education and coalition building is provided by The Education Fund.

We believe in the power of coalitions to bring people together for a common purpose. History shows that change can be made when diverse voices unite around a shared goal. We hope you will consider us your partners in making needed change happen. You can learn more about our work at www.civilrights.org. You can also reach The Leadership Conference field staff at 202-466-3315 or at grassroots@civilrights.org.

Onward!

Ellen Buchman, Vice President, Field Operations
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The Leadership Conference Education Fund



COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Not every campaign needs to incorporate a media component, but getting your messages out through print, broadcast, and online media is one of the most effective ways to reach the people who need to hear your message. To be effective while engaging with the media, you should consider how your activities can help drive news coverage in your community and which writers and broadcasters with whom you should build relationships.

Components of a Communications Strategy

How will media coverage help you achieve your ultimate goal? Figure out what you want to gain from media coverage and let that be the driving force behind your media strategy. Other things to consider:

- Audience(s): Who are you trying to reach?
- Messages: What messages will move people to take the action you want?
- Spokespeople: Who will be credible and effective in getting your message across to the people you're trying to reach?
- What kinds of media do your audiences pay attention to? What other ways can you reach them?
- Information and Events: What information do you have, or events can you create, that will interest the media enough to place stories or get your spokespeople in print or on the air?
- What are the campaign milestones that will make good stories?

Who's Your Audience and How do You Reach Them?

The media is not your target; it's an intermediary between you and the audiences you need to reach. The first step is to identify who those audiences are and the best way to reach them.

If you are building support for legislative action, the audiences you need to reach might include specific elected officials or their constituents, staff, and donors. Finding out the media that these individuals respect is an important starting point.

If you want to demonstrate credibility or power to your constituents or funders, you may want to generate coverage by mainstream media that you can share with them.

What's Your Message?

Messaging will be the heart of your communications campaign. A public education and advocacy campaign has to educate people and motivate them to take action. Your messages should accomplish both. Once you have refined your messages, get everyone involved in your campaign to use them. Repetition is key to a message sinking in.

Developing effective messages is as much art as science. But it's not rocket science. Here are some characteristics of good messaging.

Keep It Short and Simple

Prepare a short list of key campaign messages or talking points. If you have several different audiences, you might also have one or two special messages for those audiences. Each message should be short enough for a speaker to remember and repeat easily, and for a listener to understand and remember.

Inspiring and Motivating

Ground your messages in the values and priorities of the people you are trying to reach. Your main messages should let people know how taking action in your campaign will help them advance their values and create the kind of community and country they want to live in.

Use Accessible Language

Avoid jargon, overly technical terms, or acronyms that will mean more to insiders than to your audience. Also



avoid having your main messages get too far into the details of a policy proposal. You'll need to explain those details, but the main messages should get a sense of the change you want to make and the values you want to advance.

For example, if you were running a campaign to boost state support for nutrition programs by 20 percent for people living below the poverty level or trying to expand the availability of breakfast programs for children of poor families, your main messages might be something along these lines:

- We can build stronger communities by building healthier families.
- Students learn more and schools work better when children have a healthy breakfast.

Tell stories

Find ways to illustrate your main messages with stories that give them a human face. Personal stories can be more effective than policy language or political rhetoric in helping people understand what is at stake and how your campaign will make a difference in peoples' lives. Be sure to make a clear link between your story and your message.

Here's how a campaign spokesperson might link a story to a campaign message:

I've been a teacher for 15 years and I know that students who come to school without a decent breakfast have a harder time concentrating. That makes them more likely to be distracted and to distract other students. It's one more barrier to learning for children who face a lot of them. Students learn more and schools work better when children have a healthy breakfast. In my experience, it's a great investment.

Test your messages

It's always a good idea to get feedback on your intended messaging from people who are part of the audiences you are trying to reach.

Ask members of your coalition to identify a few people who would be willing to have a conversation over lunch. Or identify a church or community group that would be willing to host a conversation with some of its members. Present your draft messages, show them draft campaign materials, and encourage honest feedback. Have someone who is good at engaging people in conversation act as a moderator, probing for more than one-word answers. Larger campaigns with a budget for research often use focus groups, a professionally managed version of this process, to generate ideas that might be tested further in polling.

Identify Spokespeople

Every campaign needs a spokesperson who can convincingly communicate and reinforce your campaign messages. Your spokespeople should:

- Understand what they're talking about. Expertise in a community or issue area is the greatest asset an organization can bring to the media.
- Be considered credible, likable, and trustworthy by you, the media, and your audience.
- Be willing to be team players and stick to your campaign plan and messages.
- Have experience with media or be willing to spend time learning and practicing how to do it well.
- Be willing to commit time to appearing at public events or speaking with reporters.

Media is just one way to reach your audiences. See the "Organizing Your Community" and "Using Social Media" sections of this toolkit for discussions about reaching audiences through in-person and on-line organizing strategies.

The news media is often interested in "unexpected allies." So you may try to include people who might be viewed more typically as adversaries, such as a union official and a business leader, or political figures from different parties. You might demonstrate a breadth of community support by including religious leaders from different faiths or denominations.

Media Engagement

Make a list of the different ways you can reach your target audiences. Your media list could include "mainstream media"—such as the daily paper and local TV stations—as well as weeklies like neighborhood papers and publications targeted to specific audiences such as African Americans or Latinos. What radio stations are most popular in your target communities, and what local news or community affairs programs might interview your spokespeople? Are there major churches with newsletters that cover community affairs? Don't overlook newspapers and broadcast outlets that are in languages other than English. And don't forget the Internet; most areas now have online news outlets and bloggers that cover community affairs and local politics. Many of them have influential audiences, which include mainstream journalists.

Once you've made a list of news outlets you want to reach, identify the key media people you need to reach.



Don't Wait Until You Want Coverage to Introduce Yourself

Media relations is often about building relationships with journalists and columnists who are likely to be interested in the work you do. Sending a cold email or picking up the phone to introduce yourself to a reporter that covers the issues you work on is a much better way for him or her to learn about who you are than through a press release blast.

If you or the organizations in your coalition don't already have contacts in the media, you can build your own list including:

- Newspaper reporters who cover the issue you're working on.
- The reporter who covers your area for the Associated Press news service (www.ap.org).
- Columnists who write about politics or community affairs.
- Producers for local television and radio news.
- News anchors and reporters who cover public affairs.
- Bloggers and local opinion leaders on social media.
- Calendar editors that curate events in your region.

If you don't know the right person to talk to at a particular outlet, call the news room or assignment editor and ask who covers your issue.

Your goal is to establish a relationship that gets reporters to start thinking of you as a resource that can help them get their job done. You should:

- Provide them with useful information or help them find it.
- Return their phone calls or emails quickly.
- Find out what their deadlines are and do everything you can to meet them.
- Learn what kind of stories they write or produce, figure out angles that will work for them, pitch them ideas, and put them in touch with people they need to talk to.

If a reporter asks for information "on background" or "off the record," be sure you know exactly what he or she means by those ground rules. Background generally means the reporter can use the information without

attributing it to you. Off the record means that you're giving information that can't be used in a story. You can't apply these retroactively—by telling a reporter something and then saying, "That's off the record!" It doesn't work that way.

Most of the time, you should stay on record with a reporter. One exception might be to ask to speak on background if you want to be able to have a conversation and talk freely without making sure every sentence is put together well. You could suggest that the conversation be on background, and that at the end of the conversation you can give on the record quotes in answer to any particular question.

Grabbing the Media's Interest

What makes a good story?

As you develop a media outreach plan, keep reporters' needs in mind. A reporter needs to be able to tell a good story. And television producers or reporters need visuals to go with any story. Here are some elements of a good story that can help you get reporters interested:

- Reasons to care—how can the story make an impact on people and the community.
- Good messengers—spokespeople who are interesting or compelling.
- A particular angle or niche—a specific detail is a good way into a story, such as the number of people served by a local health clinic.
- Something specific to the calendar—a relevant anniversary, an important deadline for qualifying for federal assistance, etc.
- Making "news"—launching a campaign, releasing a report, calling for an official investigation
- Good visuals—especially for TV.
- Ease of coverage—make journalists' jobs easier by offering clear information, compelling spokespeople, and quick responses to any questions.

TIP:

- Be aware that conflict and controversy are often good stories from the media's perspective. If a reporter invites you to start or fuel a conflict, be thoughtful about how you want the story to be framed. Will fostering the conflict be helpful to your message or will it distract from the focus you want the story to have?



"Pitching" journalists

Your "pitch" is what you tell a journalist to generate interest in covering your campaign generally or a specific event. It should be short and to the point. It should take into account a journalists' need for news and a good story. Before you pick up the phone, write down your pitch and practice saying it until it sounds natural and conversational. If you have the time, it's a good idea to read or watch some of that reporter's work to get a feel for what interests them and how they approach a story, and demonstrate that you're familiar with a journalist's work when you're on the phone. If you have a hard time reaching a journalist on the phone, you can put your pitch in a written memo. Some reporters prefer to get information by email.

Here's an example of what a short pitch might look like:

Hi, Mark, this is Sheila Jackson from the Community Needs Coalition. I've seen your coverage of affordable housing issues, and I wanted to let you know that the upcoming census will have a big impact on local housing funds. Rev. Susan Schmidt, who you've spoken with in the past, is helping lead a new coalition effort to make sure everybody in our city gets counted, which has a direct effect on grant funding for housing. She'll

be speaking at a press conference on Wednesday and would be happy to talk with you about the new campaign. Can I send you some more information? Would you be interested in attending the press conference?

Be polite, but persistent. Don't be afraid to push a little if a reporter doesn't immediately show interest, but also respect that a reporter may be in the middle of something urgent. Don't take it personally if you get a quick no. Pitching in the morning is usually best for reporters' schedules.

Keep detailed records of all your conversations with reporters so you can refer to them the next time you're ready to reach out.

Making the Most of Your Interview Opportunities

Stay on message

Always know what you're going to say before talking to a reporter. This means knowing your campaign's messages and practicing them until you can say them easily and naturally. If a reporter asks you a question that seems off-topic, or wants you to comment on something you're not ready to talk about, you don't have to answer

TIPS for TV:

- People who will be representing your campaign on television should either have experience doing television or be willing to spend some time preparing. At a minimum, practice for a television interview with a video camera (or in front of a mirror) until you feel confident making your main points without stumbling. Some tips for television:
 - Keep your answers short. Practice getting your campaign's primary messages across in short, simple sentences. Include only as much detail as you need to answer the question or get your point across.
 - Smile! A huge part of how people take in information from television is visual—what you say may leave less of an impression than how you say it. You want to come across as likeable, knowledgeable, comfortable, and enthusiastic about your campaign. A big smile might feel unnatural but it will keep you from coming across as angry or sulking.
 - Keep your cool if the conversation gets contentious or unpleasant.
 - Posture and eye contact. If you're standing and talking to a reporter while being filmed by a cameraman, look at and talk to the reporter. If you're in a studio being interviewed by someone in another location, look directly into the camera. If you're seated, don't lean or slump back in your chair: leaning slightly forward will give you much better energy and look better on camera. Keep hand gestures to a minimum, and keep them away from your face.
 - Dress for success. Wear clothes that are appropriate for the setting. If you're being interviewed on a news program, wear business dress in solid colors. If you're being interviewed in a field setting, it may be appropriate to be dressed more casually. In either case, you don't want flashy patterns, jewelry, or accessories to distract attention from you and your message.
 - Don't ever assume that the camera or microphone is off.



TIPS for Pitching:

Assume reporters are busy and respect their schedules.

- Start a call by asking, "Are you on deadline?" If the answer is yes, ask for a good time to call back. Reporters are more likely to be on deadline and less likely to be able to talk to you in mid-to late afternoon. Morning or early evening calls are a better bet.

Be prepared.

- You won't have a lot of time to make your pitch. Practice your delivery so that you can make your points quickly and smoothly. And have background information or detailed data at your fingertips in case the reporter starts asking questions.

their question directly. You can deflect it and get back to one of the main messages you want to get out. Don't worry about being repetitive—repetition is key to getting your message to sink in.

Don't ramble

Keep your sentences short and direct and stop when you've said what you want to say. Some reporters use silence to get you to ramble. Don't be afraid to stop and wait for them to ask the next question.

Reporters will often end an interview with a sort of wrap-up question such as, "Do you have anything else to say?" Use this as an opportunity to repeat your basic message as you'd like it to be used.

Take time if you need it.

If a reporter calls with questions, it's okay to take a little time to collect your thoughts. You can ask a reporter what kinds of things they want to talk about, and ask if you can call back in a few minutes. Then you can think about your main points, write out a few sentences if it will help you be clear about what you want to say, and call back. The basic goal is to know what you're going to say before you say it.

Always tell the truth—Never fake it

If you give false information to a reporter, you and your campaign will have a hard time regaining credibility. If you're asked about anything that you don't know the answer to, don't make it up. Just say, "I'm not sure about that detail, but I'll find out and get back to you." And then be sure to follow up.

Be friendly, but not a friend

You should assume that anything you say to a reporter could end up in print or on the air. Be careful about a reporter asking casual, "What do you really think?" kinds of questions after a formal interview seems over. You don't want to create an "interesting" story that would

distract from your main message. The same goes for communicating by email. Don't be lulled by informal communication and write something you'd be unhappy to see in a column or blog post.

Holding a Press Conference

You don't have to have a press conference to talk to reporters. If you have information you want to share, you can just send it and follow-up with a phone call. You can invite media to cover events where actual campaign activity is taking place, such as a public rally, debate, or canvassing campaign. Only hold a news conference when you are releasing information that is new or important enough to be considered news by reporters, when you can present a great visual (such as a big group of supporters), or you have speakers who by virtue of their own position or celebrity will draw reporters to you.

If you decide to hold a press conference:

- Pick a time and location that is convenient for reporters.
- Reserve the room or get any necessary permits for an event on public property.
- Make sure the space is accessible for people with disabilities.
- Email a media advisory a few days before the event.
- Follow up in the days before the event with phone calls pitching the event to reporters—practice your pitch so you can quickly and convincingly describe the event, the news, and if appropriate, the good stories and visual images that will be available.
- Think about the visual that your speakers and supporters will present. Will they show the diversity and breadth of your coalition?



Among the basics you might need:

- Podium.
- Sound system, microphones, and an audio mult box for TV or radio reporters.
- Campaign banner or other visual backdrop.
- Water for the speakers.
- Materials that will make it easier for reporters to get the story right: a press release for the event, a short paragraph identifying each of the speakers, written copies of speakers' remarks, and whatever campaign materials or background information will help explain the issue and the campaign.

Don't let your press conference drag on. You don't want reporters to lose interest or feel like you're wasting their time. Aim for a few speakers (ideally no more than four, with the most well-known or newsworthy speaking last) each talking for a few minutes, so that you get from presentations to reporters' questions in 15 or 20 minutes.

If possible, record your own event with a digital video recorder. That way you'll be able to create your own news by putting the event or edited highlights on a website and send it to local bloggers and news outlets. The same goes for taking still photographs.

After the press conference, send the press release and other materials to reporters who did not make it to the event and follow up with phone calls offering them the opportunity to speak with one or more of the speakers.

Holding a Telephone Press Conference

A telephone press conference can be a great alternative to a traditional press conference. Among the benefits of a teleconference: you don't need to find (or rent) a location; speakers from different places without traveling; it's easier for reporters to cover the event while working at their desks; and you can reach out to reporters from a broader area, including other parts of your state or nationally. The main drawback to a teleconference is that you won't get television coverage or an opportunity to make your own videos of the event.

The planning process for a teleconference is much the same as with a traditional press conference:

- Pick your speakers carefully.
- Be sure your speakers are prepared (ideally, your speakers will do a practice run-through of their planned remarks before the call).

- Promote the teleconference with a media advisory followed up with phone calls.
- Record the event for your own use with a digital audio recorder or ask the teleconferencing service to record it for you and/or provide a transcript.
- Follow up with reporters who joined the call to see if they have any other questions.
- Contact reporters who don't call in and offer to send them copies of the report released or audio files of the presentations.

If you expect just a few participants, you could use a standard conference call number, where everyone calls in and can speak and be heard by others. However, there are real downsides to an open conference call, including background noise from other callers, the disruption of

Sample Media Advisory

Community Leaders to Launch 'Every Voter Counts' Campaign

Local Voters

With access to the ballot under attack, a group of labor, civic, and religious leaders will launch a diverse grassroots campaign to make sure every voter in the state knows their rights. A press conference will be followed by a town hall meeting will take place at the City Labor Center.

What: Press conference to launch 'Every Voter Counts' Campaign

Who: Dr. Jane Doe, State Advocates for the Ballot

Bill Smith, President, Eastern University Student Association

Joe Washington, City Labor Council

Rev. Sue Rodriguez, City Ministerial Alliance

When: Tuesday, October 10th at 10:00 a.m.

Where: City Labor Center steps (rain location— City Labor Center Room 210)

Why: Launch campaign to ensure all voters are aware of recent changes in state voting rights laws, discuss stakes for different constituencies, and talk about campaign strategies for overcoming challenges that new voting rights laws that voters may face.

For more information, contact Joe Johns at 222-222-2222.



Sample Messages and Talking Points

Below are some suggested points regarding the *Shelby* decision, and the need for Congress to act in a bipartisan manner to address the decision with legislation that would restore the Voting Rights Act's vital voter protections:

- **The Rights of Millions of Voters Have Been Put in Peril:** The *Shelby* decision essentially suspended the use of the most effective protection voters had against racial discrimination in voting. While other important sections of the Voting Rights Act remain in force, those sections alone are not sufficient, especially in places with a recent and persistent record of voting discrimination.
- **The Public, Members of Congress, and the Supreme Court Agree that Voting Discrimination is a Serious Problem that Requires a Solution:** There is nearly unanimous agreement that voting discrimination remains a serious problem. However, the Court's decision took away the most effective enforcement tool our nation has to identify and prevent this discrimination. Congress must now modernize the law to ensure that the right to vote, which is the right that fundamentally protects all other constitutional rights, is not denied or abridged.
- **Protecting Voting Rights Is an American Issue, not a Partisan One:** There is a strong bipartisan consensus that voters must be protected from racial discrimination. Since the *Shelby* decision, many Republicans and Democrats in Congress have issued statements about the need to restore voting protections. Time and again, members of Congress from both parties and across the country have come together to reauthorize and strengthen the Voting Rights Act. Many of the members who supported the last reauthorization are still serving in Congress.
- **Congress Is Already Engaged in a Bipartisan Process to Ensure Nondiscrimination in Voting:** Since the *Shelby* decision, the House of Representatives and the Senate have held hearings on the decision and the importance of the protections of the Voting Rights Act. Congress must act thoughtfully, but swiftly, to ensure that minority voters are protected. The process should be bipartisan, consensus-driven, and a model for how successful legislation is developed. Democrats and Republicans must work together to support the strongest voting rights protections possible.
- **Congress Has the Constitutional Authority and Moral Responsibility to Protect our Voting Rights:** Congress has the express authority under the 14th and 15th Amendments of the Constitution to protect voters from racial discrimination. It is critical that Congress modernize the Voting Rights Act to protect voting rights for all.
- **To Win Bipartisan Support for Fixing the *Shelby* Decision, We Must Maintain Our Focus on Restoring the Voting Rights Act:** While there are other important voting and election issues, it's paramount that we ensure that every American can exercise his or her constitutional right to vote free from racial discrimination. Congress must come together in a bipartisan way to restore the Voting Rights Act and protect real voters from racial discrimination. While other important sections of the Voting Rights Act remain in force, those sections alone are not sufficient to protect voters.

"hold music" if one of the callers puts the conference on hold, and a lack of control over questions. Commercial services can set up moderated calls that gives you complete control over the question and answer session. *See the "Organizing Your Community" section of this toolkit for more information on these services.*

Media Advisory

A media advisory is a document used to invite reporters to cover some kind of event, such as a press conference, forum, or rally. A media advisory should be short and to the point.

The goal of any advisory is to make the event sound interesting, newsworthy, and easy for reporters to quickly figure out the details. Give some thought to the visuals that could make it more appealing for a television reporter or news photographer to cover—and spell them out. You can use a media advisory to let people know

about a formal event, like a news conference, or something less formal, like the fact that campaign activists will be working the crowd at a street fair or community event. *See the example on page 23.*

Press Release

A press release is a document that tells the story about an event, report, or news item. One trick to writing

TIP on Press Releases:

- Approach your release as a reporter would. The fact that your group is putting out a report isn't news—it's what your report has to say. So your headline and opening sentence should not start with "Local group releases new report" but "New report documents urgent need for change on big issue."



a press release is to pretend that you're writing the story you would like to read in the paper the next day. Start with the news that you're making, include quotes from one or more of your spokespeople close to the beginning, and be sure to include the most important messages you want people to hear. You don't have to include every detail. A press release should be short enough (usually one page) for reporters to quickly get your key messages. You can provide more background in a fact sheet or in a conversation.

Letters to the Editor

One of the most widely read sections of any newspaper is the page featuring letters to the editor. The letters page is a great way for your campaign to get its message out. Most papers print short letters, so you're better off if you can get your message across in fewer than 200 words. Letters are more likely to be printed if they are responding to an event or a story that ran in the paper.

Keep an eye out for news stories on topics that are relevant to your issue, and respond regularly. For example, with the census:

- If there's a story about people without access to health care, you can point out that federal and state health funds will be distributed to communities based on census figures.
- If there's a story about school funding, or the poor condition of local roads, that gives you an opportunity to point out that funding for key

services and infrastructure are based on population figures from the census.

You don't have to be complaining about coverage to get printed—you can use a letter to the editor to reinforce a good story and get its messages into the paper one more time. Most papers don't want to run a lot of letters from the same person, so encourage different community leaders and advocates to write letters.

Resources

The Spitfire Strategies Smart Chart for Assessing Communications, from Spitfire Strategies. www.spitfirestrategies.com.

Strategic Communications for Nonprofits: A Step-by-Step Guide to Working with the Media, by Kathy Bonk, Emily Tynes, Henry Griggs, and Phil Sparks. Published by the Communications Consortium Media Center. www.ccmc.org.

SPIN Works! A Media Guidebook for Communicating Values and Shaping Public Opinion, by Robert Bray, and other publications on communications strategy. www.spinproject.org.

Sample Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

The recent story on voting rights ("Update To State's Voting Rights Laws," January 10) makes it clear why a civic education campaign like "Every Voter Counts" is important. If local voters are not informed and up to speed on the drastic changes that we have seen in voting rights law, many voters will find that their vote will not be cast. The "Every Voter Counts" campaign will provide vulnerable populations such as seniors, students and the low-income with the tools they need to ensure they are ready to cast their ballot free of confusion.

Joe Doe

To the Editor:

Your story about new voting rights legislation creating a toll on voters demonstrates the importance of doing everything we can to ensure all voters throughout the state are prepared for Election Day. The "Every Voter Counts" campaign was created by a statewide coalition that has identified the most important tools and tactics that must be utilized if voters throughout our state will be prepared to head to the polls during on Election Day. It's time for all of us to work together to ensure democracy remains a reality in our state.

Julia Esquivel



Sample Press Release

For Immediate Release

(DATE)

Contact: (NAME, Contact Information)

(STATE/COMMUNITY) Parents and Advocates Urge Senator(s) (NAME) to Maintain Strong Federal Role in Education Bill

(CITY, STATE ABBREVIATION) – On (DATE), (NUMBER OF PEOPLE) (STATE/COMMUNITY) parents and advocates met with Senator (NAME) to discuss the importance of a strong federal role and state accountability in education.

Parents and advocates discussed with Senator(s) (NAME) the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a law that has, for more than five decades, helped ensure that all children—especially children of color, children living in poverty, children with disabilities, and children learning English—have fair access to the quality education they deserve.

During the meeting(s), parents and advocates spoke with Senator(s) (NAME) about (MEETING TOPIC(s) OF DISCUSSION).

Senator(s) (NAME) told the group that (SENATOR(s) RESPONSE/COMMENTS)

"We believe that a strong federal role in the reauthorization of ESEA is imperative to the success of all of our students, and we are concerned about attempts in Washington to weaken this critical law. We thank Senator(s) (NAME) for meeting with us to discuss this crucial issue, and urge (him/her/them) to protect the rights and interests of all our students," said (NAME).