ADVOCACY, EDUCATION & LOBBYING

A plain-language guide for Council members and staff

Public policy is part of our job. The DD Act expects Councils to advocate, educate policymakers, support self-advocacy, and work for systems change.

Council Role vs. Personal Role: Council members and staff keep their rights as private citizens. It is important to clearly keep your role as a council member separate from your role as advocating for yourself or your loved one. Ask yourself: Am I representing the council or myself? Did the council pay for me to be here? If yes, you need to not directly ask decision makers to take a position.

If you are not representing the council, you should not mention being a council member when advocating.

GREEN **Usually OK**	YELLOW **Stop & Check**	RED **Do Not Use Federal Council Funds**
• Explain what a bill or policy would do.	• Talk about a specific bill.	• Tell a legislator: "Vote YES on HB 1234."
• Share facts, data, stories, and community input.	• Give formal testimony.	• Tell a legislator: "Vote NO on SB 5678."
• Explain how people with disabilities could be affected.	• Share an official Council position on legislation.	• Asking a legislator to sponsor or introduce a specific bill.
• Educate policymakers about Council priorities.	• Respond to a formal request from a legislative body.	• Use Federal Council funds to urge the public to contact lawmakers and demand a particular vote.
• Participate in public comment.	• Mix your Council role with personal or professional lobbying.	• Using Federal Council funds for activities intended to pass or defeat specific legislation.
• Help self-advocates learn how public policy works.	• For activities where you are unsure about the funding or purpose, seek guidance from Council staff.	

Talking about a bill is NOT automatically lobbying.

We can explain legislation and its possible effects. The key question is whether federal Council resources are being used to **inform and educate** or to **influence specific legislative action.**

A QUICK CHECK BEFORE YOU ACT

1. What are we trying to do? Educate and inform, OR get someone to take a specific legislative action?

2. Are we asking for a vote? If you are asking someone to vote for or against a bill, stop and check.

3. Are we asking others to contact lawmakers? If the message tells people to demand support or opposition to a bill, stop and check.

4. Are federal funds or Council resources involved? Funding matters. Council time, travel, contracts, communications, and other resources are usually federally funded.

5. Are we responding to an official request? Formal requests for testimony or technical assistance can have different rules. Check before relying on an exception.

6. Still unsure? Ask before acting. A quick check is easier than untangling a problem later.

Public policy is part of our job.
The goal is not to stay away from it.
The goal is to participate effectively and within the rules.

Sources and guidance

- Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, 42 U.S.C. § 15025.
- Administration for Community Living / ITACC, Information to Assist DD Council Public Policy and Advocacy Activities (January 2025).
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, federal grant lobbying restrictions.

Note: This is general guidance, not legal advice. Specific situations can depend on the activity, funding source, legislative context, and other facts.