



Missouri
PTA[®]
everychild.one voice.[®]

Legislative Handbook

A Guide to Missouri PTA Legislative and Advocacy

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CONTENTS

LEGISLATION & ADVOCACY - PTA OVERVIEW	3
ADVOACAY IS FOR ALL PTA MEMBERS	3
DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE	4
HOW TO BE A LEGISLATIVE CHAIR	5
ISSUES, POLITICS, & ISSUES	7
JC/DC NETWORK & TAKING ACTION	9
RESOURCES & AWARDS	10

About PTA

PTA® comprises families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of parent involvement in schools. PTA is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit association that prides itself on being a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education. Membership in PTA is open to anyone who wants to be involved and make a difference for the education, health, and welfare of children and youth.

LEGISLATION & ADVOCACY

Cornerstone of PTA



Alice McLellan Birney

Since 1897, when Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst called for action to eliminate threats that endangered children, forming what would become the PTA, legislation and advocacy have been at the heart of our mission. This simple belief, EveryChild OneVoice, is unique to PTA and sets us apart from other parent teacher groups and organizations. The mission is the same today as it was more than 100 years ago - to better the lives of all children. Issues that have been tackled by the PTA include: child labor laws, creation of Kindergarten classes, public health services, the school hot lunch program, juvenile justice system and mandatory immunizations.



Phoebe Apperson Hearst

PTA defines advocacy as the act of supporting and speaking on behalf of children and youth in the schools, in the community, and before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children. Advocacy stands alone as the most important job of the PTA.

Advocacy is for all PTA Members

As a PTA member you should...

- Believe that your voice matters!
- Know, promote and be loyal to Missouri PTA [Legislative Positions and Priorities](#).
- Join the [JC/DC Member-to-Member Legislative Network](#) respond to legislative alerts.
- Attend training offered in a School of Information, state Regional Conferences, and the Missouri PTA Convention. Check out [National PTA's e-learning programs](#) on the web at www.pta.org.
- Keep informed of what is happening in Jefferson City through the local news, newspaper or the web - www.moga.mo.gov and www.mopta.org.
- Talk to district administrators to find out what issues are important at your local district level.
- Contact your unit, council or state PTA Legislative Chairman for information on legislative issues.
- Attend a Kid's First Town Hall Meeting in your region. The cost is free, the time is minimal, the benefits to children and youth maximal (details at www.mopta.org).
- Register to Vote!
- ***Vote!***

Who makes up the Legislation & Advocacy Department? All levels of PTA are involved in and work together to make sure legislation and advocacy is covered from Washington D.C. down to the local city or township.

National PTA Legislative Department

- Develops the PTA Federal Policy
- Tracks Federal bills, appropriations, regulations, reauthorization processes, etc.
- Issues Action Alerts on Federal issues
- Networks with other national organizations
- Organizes testimonies and strategic meetings

Missouri PTA Legislative Department

- Develops the Missouri PTA legislative platform
- Tracks bills Missouri bills, testifies and issues Action Alerts
- Develops the Legislative Handbook & web pages, Contact articles and monthly legislative reports (Sept-May)
- Networks with other state organizations
- Assists units and councils with Town Hall meetings
- Oversees state resolutions and position statements

Unit/Council Legislative Chair

- Gives legislative updates at meetings and in unit/council newsletters
- Passes along Action Alerts to members
- Encourages participation in the JC/DC network
- Organizes Town Halls, candidate forums, voter registration, candidate informational questionnaires, etc.

Each PTA unit and each PTA council should have an active Legislative Chairman and Committee. If your unit or council has not been involved in legislative activities in the past, there is no better time than now to start. Missouri's children and youth deserve your time and efforts as advocates for them. Your representative government needs to hear the issues and concerns for your child, the children in your school, the children across your district and the children across Missouri. We know for a fact that elected officials stop and take notice when even ten or so letters, emails, or phone calls are received on any single issue. Imagine the effect we can have when we, the 65,000+ members of the Missouri PTA, work together on a single issue.

Equally important to the work of communicating with our legislators is that of communicating with our PTA members on legislation and ballot issues affecting children and youth. Copies of the [Legislative priorities](#) may be requested from the Missouri PTA office or downloaded from the Missouri PTA [website at www.mopta.org](http://www.mopta.org). We ask that you obtain enough copies to distribute at unit meetings, council meetings, and school board meetings. Permission is granted to reprint in newsletters as well.

If you care about kids and bring passion to what you do then you have what it takes to be a legislative chair. PTA provides you with the tools to assist you in becoming a successful Legislative Chair.

HOW TO BE A LEGISLATIVE CHAIR

Advocacy has been the cornerstone of PTA since our founding in 1897 and remains the primary focus today. Many major landmark policies for children such as child labor laws, the Juvenile Justice system and hot school lunches, are examples of PTA advocates pushing for reform. Of course changes doesn't take place overnight. Advocacy is often a gradual process. It requires patience and year-to-year efforts. It is the job of the legislative chair to both inform and encourage advocacy by all our members.

STEP ONE

When you first become a Legislative Chair:

- Send your email and contact information to the [state office](#). This will ensure you are added to the Legislative Chair email list.
- Sign up for the JC/DC network.
- Download or bookmark a copy of the Missouri Legislative Handbook. There is an electronic copy on ['Advocacy Resource'](#) section of the Missouri PTA website.
- Familiarize yourself with the 'Advocacy' tab of the [MOPTA.org](#) site and the 'Advocacy' tab of the [PTA.org](#) site – bookmark them!

Training:

No one expects you to know everything. There are a variety of trainings available throughout the year and online to help you feel more comfortable in this position.

- PTA webinars or E-learning Modules are available under the ['Running a PTA'](#) tab of [PTA.org](#)
- School of Information
- Convention (both Missouri PTA and National PTA)
- Regional Leadership conferences
- PTA Legislative Conference – national training in the D.C. area that concludes with a day lobbying on Capitol Hill

Monthly:
 Legislative reports at unit meetings and articles for newsletters. The MOPTA Legislative Department produces a monthly (September – May) suggested legislative report. This report will provide you with local, state and national information. Utilize this report to create your own report by cutting and pasting information. A basic report template is available on the 'Advocacy Resource' page located in the Legislation section of the Missouri PTA website. You can also submit information from the suggested report to your unit newsletter or announcements.



sample of monthly report

HOW TO BE A LEGISLATIVE CHAIR

Elections:

There are two main elections during the school year. They are both held on the first Tuesday of their respective months.

- November is the general election. Legislators at the state and federal level are elected at this time and state propositions are brought before the voters.
- April is the school board election. This is generally the same time school bonds and levies are brought before the voters.

Because of the PTA's 501(c)(3) status there are IRS restrictions PTAs must observe when it comes to elections. PTAs cannot be part of PACs (Political Action Committee) and they cannot support or oppose candidates. However there are many things your PTA can do to promote advocacy during elections.

- Host voter registration tables
- Encourage member to register and vote
- Host or co-host student mock elections
- Support or oppose propositions – these must fall in line with PTA mission, purposes, resolutions and positions
- Support school bond and levy issues
- Host candidate forums – all candidates must be invited to participate
- Publish candidate questionnaires – all candidates must be invited to participate and answers must be published as received from the candidates



Legislation

Missouri Regular Legislative session runs from January (the first Wednesday after the first Monday) through May 30th. The last day to consider bills is the first Friday after the second Monday in May. Legislators can start pre-filing bills on December 1st.

- The Missouri Legislative Department posts a bill watch list beginning in December on the '[Capitol Chatter](#)' page of the website.
- JC/DC alerts are issued when action on a bill is pending.
- Encourage members to sign up the [JC/DC alerts](#).
- Pass alerts on to members through your own email network.
- Provide your membership with the names and contact information for your legislative representatives at the state and federal level.
- Provide members with copies of the "[Communicating with Legislators](#)" and "Advocacy is for All Members".
- Hold a Kid's First Town Hall – The Legislative Department works with local unit/councils to host Kid's First Town Hall events. Each year the Legislative Department develops a list of Town Hall questions. These questions can be modified to fit your area's needs.
- Communicate with your superintendent and local teachers' associations in an effort to gather information on education legislative issues in your district and work towards mutual legislative goals.
- Invite representatives to a local meeting to speak regarding PTA priorities and concerns.
- Pass along the [Legislative Priorities](#) to your state representatives and senators along with a letter from your unit.
- Show appreciation to those legislators who support PTA positions. Build an ongoing relationship with your legislators. It is easier to ask for something from a friend than a stranger. It is also easier if you don't only call when you need something.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

Our voice is defined by our Mission and Purpose, resolutions and positions. Resolutions and positions are drafted and voted upon by the membership at both the National and State level. Resolutions passed and positions approved define how and if we can address or speak to an issue. When representing PTA on a particular issue always present the will of the membership not your own personal view.

Not sure if PTA has a stance on a particular issue? Both National and Missouri PTA's resolutions and positions are available online. You can find them at:

- [National PTA Resolutions & Positions](#)
- [Missouri PTA Resolutions & Positions](#)

Resolutions also form the foundation for all Missouri PTA positions and legislative priorities. Our legislative platform is based on the adopted resolutions, and programs are designed to address the issues stated by those adopted resolutions. The resolution process gives us direction to make our world a safer, brighter one for all Missouri children and youth.

The development of resolutions is a project that all PTA members, units, and councils should take seriously and become actively involved in. If there is an issue that you, your unit, or your council are concerned about and needs to be addressed by a resolution on behalf of all Missouri's children, it is incumbent upon you to take action. Information on how to submit a resolution is included in the Resolution Guide.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Both Missouri PTA and National PTA develop legislative priorities each year. Missouri PTA's are released in October/November, prior to the start of the Missouri Legislative Session. National PTA's Public Policy is released in January/February in conjunction with the beginning of the congressional session. The priorities are selected based on the following criteria: timeliness of issue (is it being considered before either the Missouri General Assembly or Congress and the Administration), opportunities for PTA to provide leadership and expertise to our legislators, alignment to PTA's mission and resolutions, and ability to achieve a meaningful policy change that will produce positive results for children and their families.

[National PTA's Public Policy](#)
[Missouri PTA's Legislative Priorities](#)



LOBBYIST OR ADVOCATES?

Quite often the words “lobbying” and “advocacy” are used interchangeably. However there is a difference. All lobbying is a form of advocacy but not all forms of advocacy are lobbying. Advocacy encompasses a wide variety of activities. In the context of PTA, this means supporting and speaking up for children – in schools, in community and before government bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children. Lobbying is defined as the attempt to influence a public official or decision-maker in favor of a specific opinion or cause.

POLITICS & ELECTIONS



Due to PTA's 501(c)(3) status there are specific things in which PTAs can and cannot engage when it comes to politics. PTAs are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for elective public office. A good rule to follow - if a candidate is involved we must remain completely neutral. However there are many ways PTAs can inform their membership.

When it comes to ballot issues, such as bonds and ordinances, PTA absolutely can take a position of support or opposition. The issues that come before local communities more often than not directly affect the children in that community. It is part of our mission and purpose to make sure the best interest of children remain a high priority in our local communities.

If you ever have any questions about the role of PTA in politics and elections please contact a member of the Missouri PTA Legislation and Advocacy Department. We are here to answer your questions and provide assistance.



PTA Don'ts

- Invite only one candidate in an election to come speak to the PTA.
- Tell PTA members to only vote for a candidate who supports X position.
- Distribute any campaign materials on behalf of a candidate.
- Wear campaign buttons or T-shirts during a PTA meeting.
- Establish, participate in or support PACs (Political Action Committees).

Do not let the "Don'ts" deter your council or unit. It is our job to work towards our purpose of creating a better community for our children. PTA has been doing this for over 100 years, and continues advocating for children's welfare yearly. DO get your Council or Unit involved in the legislative process! Be the one to bring advocacy to your Unit or Council!

PTA Do's

- PTAs should support issues that are good for children and youth. PTA should oppose issues that are bad for children and youth. That includes state and national legislation, as well as local laws and school district policies. PTA can and should take a stand on bond and levy issues.
- PTAs can sponsor public forums (including candidates forums – all candidates must be invited), lectures and debates.
- PTAs can send out questionnaires to all candidates asking in an unbiased way for their positions on issues. The results must be reported accurately and without editorial comment.
- PTAs can conduct voter registrations. The registration must be open to anyone, regardless of which party or candidates they want to vote for after registering.
- Remind members to vote.
- Educate candidates on issues important to PTA.

JC/DC NETWORK & TAKING ACTION

Legislators need to hear from you in order to vote on your behalf. Unless they hear from constituents, legislators may vote their party line or in line with their personal beliefs.

ACTION ALERTS

Missouri PTA and National PTA both send out Action Alerts when immediate action is needed on legislative issues. The JC/DC Network is an email notification system utilized to alert subscribers when an Action Alert has been issued. The list is confidential and only utilized for this singular purpose. Because most legislative issues are time sensitive, email alerts are the most effective way to reach members quickly. Responding to an action alert is quick and easy. Missouri PTA will state in the action alert the issue and why we support/oppose. By going online to either the Missouri House of Representatives or Missouri Senate website, members can use the wording in the action alert to email their own elected officials. National PTA uses a program that has suggested wording already in place. Members can opt to use the preformatted wording, edited it or replace it with their own. Not sure whom are your elected officials? Click here to find all your representative information

Not a member - Sign up today!

Subscribe to the [JC/DC network](#)

You can also subscribe directly to [NPTA's alert system](#)

COMMUNICATING WITH LEGISLATORS

E-Mail

Emails should contain the basics of effective, professional letter writing. Do not use abbreviations, trendy letter combinations or symbols to make your message heard. Have another person proofread your letter before you send it. Use spell check if available, and copy others that need or want to be kept informed of the situation.

- Keep the message brief, clear, and concise.
- State the bill you are addressing by number or popular name.
- Make sure you state why you want the bill supported or opposed.
- Properly address and include your contact information.

Generally, due to security measures, email is preferred over personal letters.

Anonymous communications are not read. Don't forget to include your name and title, address, phone number and email address on all forms of communication.

Personal Visits

Meeting in person to discuss a particular bill or issue is the BEST way to influence your legislator. Keep these things in mind:

- Make an appointment ahead of time and arrive promptly.
- Make sure your legislator knows you are speaking on behalf of the PTA. You also need to remember you are speaking for PTA. Use "we," not "I." Bring copies of the current MOPTA Legislative Priorities flyer.
- Always be respectful in your tone and language.
- Present yourself in a professional manner – business casual is acceptable.
- Be reasonable in presenting your position(s). Be a good opponent by fighting the issue, not the person.
- Present the facts and reasons why your PTA is involved in the issue.
- Use the art of compromise – offer possible alternatives.
- Thank your Legislator for their time and interest.

RESOURCES

A variety of resources are available to assist you with your legislative and advocacy endeavors and they can all be found online. Take some time to browse around and bookmark both the Missouri and National PTA legislative webpages.

Missouri Advocacy page - www.mopta.org

Advocacy resources webpage

- How to be a Legislative Chair
- Monthly legislative Chair suggestive reports
- Letter to Legislator Template
- JC/DC
- Guide to hosting candidate forums
- Resolution Guide
- Legislative Platform
- Town Hall Guide

Take Action

- Current action alerts

Capitol Chatter webpage

- Bill watch list
- Articles/information

Resolutions webpage

- Current and historical MOPTA resolutions
- MOPTA position statements

Student Data Privacy

- Privacy Pledge
- Information on what data is collected
- Student data privacy laws

National Advocacy page

- Advocacy toolkit
- PTA votes
- Federal Public Policy
- Guide to State assessments
- PTA takes action network

RESOURCES & AWARDS



Missouri PTA Advocacy site



National PTA Advocacy site

ATLAW AWARD

The Advocacy through Legislation Award (AtLAW) is offered by Missouri PTA to: give Missouri PTA members, units and councils who champion the issues of children some of the recognition they deserve, and encourage other members to step forward as caring voices for children. Missouri PTA members, units and councils earning this prestigious award will be recognized at Convention with a certificate and a special lapel pin to identify the awardee as an advocate for children in the fullest and best sense of the word. More information and forms for the AtLaw downloaded from the form section of the MOPTA.org website.