Legislative Action Toolkit

2014

Media Literacy Now, Inc.
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Introduction

Welcome! You are part of a rapidly growing movement of parents, educators and concerned citizens around the United States who know that media literacy is vital for our children.

We are in the midst of an exciting time. State-by state, policy to elevate media literacy as a priority is taking root. We believe legislation is one of the most important and efficient ways to ensure this needed education for our children is made possible.

Over and over, we see that grassroots, state-level advocacy is the engine moving media literacy education forward. Thank you for your willingness to work with your state legislators to make comprehensive media literacy education a reality.

This Toolkit has been developed to empower your local Media Literacy Now chapter with the means to advocate and secure local legislation for media literacy policy. As always, we’re here to help you succeed.

Sincerely,

Erin McNeill
President, Media Literacy Now
HOW TO GET STARTED

Create your plan by following this step-by-step guide. You’ll find resources on the following pages to help you accomplish this.

1) Identify your legislators, and research their positions on issues. See page 4.

2) Find out if there is any relevant legislation in your state. It’s important to know what’s out there, if anything. You can find this information on the MLN website under the Legislation>>Your State Legislation tab.

3) Identify and strategize your statewide goals. Every state is unique and we are happy to work with you on this. Your initial objective is to identify a primary bill sponsor.

4) Develop your outreach. Besides your own legislators, who else would be most likely to support media literacy education?

5) Personalize the templates in this toolkit so that they relate specifically to you, your state, and what you want to accomplish.

6) Begin outreach to key legislators and their aides via email, letter and phone. Request a meeting. Every state is different and we are happy to work with you on the right timing for this.

8) Use media and social media to spark interest, build awareness and gain supporters.

9) Meet with legislators. Look to develop or strengthen an alliance. Strong relationships make all the difference. Talking Points are included in this toolkit.

10) Leave an informational packet with them.
HOW TO GET STARTED continued

Once you have identified a sponsor in one or both houses, you will work with them on each next step. We have a sample bill summary and fact sheet for legislators to distribute to colleagues. You can download it from the website and work with your sponsoring legislator to customize it.

12) Stay in close touch. Repetition and visibility are crucial. Be positive. Encourage your elected officials. They will come to see you as the subject matter expert on media literacy.

13) Sometimes, we have to be nimble and work with processes. Other times, we have to be patient. Use the time to keep building public awareness and the media literacy movement in your state. Keep building news media and social media visibility. Remember, the national chapter is here to help you succeed.

13) Hold a legislative event, such as Media Literacy Day, press conference or public meeting at your state house.

14) Accept offers to testify on behalf of the legislation.

15) Be sure to publicly recognize your legislators for what they are doing to help.
HOW TO RESEARCH LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

The first step is to make sure you know who represents you at the state level. Your own representative and senator are the most likely allies.

You will want to learn more about those lawmakers, what issues they are most interested in, and what legislation they have supported in the past.

Start with your state’s own government website and directory of legislators. Not only are individual legislators listed, there is often a lot more, important information that you may need. Also, you can often find their personal website which often has a lot of information about their positions on issues.

Also look for other likely allies, such as legislators on committees concerned with education or public health.

You’ll also want to know whom the key legislative leaders are and where they tend to stand on relevant issues. That includes the Senate President and the Speaker of the House.

Legislators sit on committees that address specific issues. The Ways and Means Committee, for instance, looks at budgets. See if there is a specific education committee or if it’s broken out into human services or other areas. Committees draft legislation and there are often one or two legislators who will push a particular bill forward.

Do further research on your representative and other likely allies on these sites:

USA.gov
Votesmart.org/officials
Openstates.org
Use this site to look for relevant legislation on education, literacy, media education, social media legislation:

Legiscan.com

Not every state has legislative aides. If your state does, it’s very important to know who they are. They will often provide the doorway into your legislator’s office. When you first contact your legislator you’ll often hear back from one of her/his aides first. The positive relationship you make right at the beginning will help you enormously.
TEMPLATES FOR EMAIL

We all strive to make sure our advocacy emails are clear, to the point, well organized and courteous in tone.

The subject line should be short, crisp and clear. Think of it as a headline. The email itself should be short, as well, with a link for more information to the Media Literacy Now web page for your state. We will work with you to set this page up in advance. Many legislators have constituent days where their district voters can come and speak with them. You can go to see them at these specified hours, or ask for a meeting. But remember these officials work for you and it is their job to hear your concerns.

Here is a sample introductory email to send to your legislator:

_______________________________________________________________________________

Subject Line: Media Literacy Education

Dear Senator/Representative (Name),

My name is (      ) and I work with our state Media Literacy Now chapter.

Children today are overwhelmed by unhealthy media messages and violent or sexualized images. We believe comprehensive media literacy education in our schools is the most effective way to help our kids by teaching them skills to analyze and questions this media.

Several states are already moving forward and we can’t be left behind. You can learn more about our efforts here (link MLN state website).

Would you be able to schedule some time on your calendar to learn more about our local, growing movement?

Appreciatively,

(Your name)

(Your address)

Media Literacy Now

(Your State) chapter
**LETTER WRITING**

In addition to an email, you may want to send your legislator a hard copy letter. It will give you a bit more room to state your case. In our digital age, an actual paper letter can stand out. It provides documentation and can't be easily deleted or overwhelmed by other incoming messages the way an email can.

Letter writing is an active way to communicate about legislation you want proposed, or to ask for support of pending legislation.

Letter writing campaigns can also be extremely effective if the issue or actual legislation is getting buried. Develop your letter message and send out as an attachment in an email to your chapter members. Ask everyone to email, or print and mail the letter personally to their own legislators, and to also send it on to others who support the cause of media literacy.

Legislators pay attention to their constituents. Letter writers should include home addresses so the legislator knows the letter is coming from a constituent.

*Letter Template*

Below are two Letter Templates (one shorter, one longer) that you can customize for your own state's needs. The first one is more exploratory. The second would be written for specific action. Pick the one that works for you. TAKE THE PAGE NUMBER OFF THE BOTTOM!
Date
Title and Name
Address
Re: Media Literacy Education /Bill Number (if one exists)

Dear (name of elected official),

My name is ( ) and I am writing to ask for your support in bringing media literacy to our state’s children.

Media’s negative effects on children are well-documented. Our state’s young people are widely exposed to violence, adult sexuality and manipulative ads through TV, movies, websites and video games. Media literacy education gives children the critical analysis skills they need to question these messages.

Several states are making the protection of children a priority by moving legislation supporting media literacy education in public schools.

We need your support on (add local information).

I appreciate your attention to this and ask for a meeting with you to discuss this.

Sincerely,

(Your name)
(Your address)
Dear (Insert name of Elected Official):

I'm writing as one of your constituents who cares about the way our children are taught to interpret and consume media. Our children live in a world with powerful 24/7 media. In the last decade, there has been a drastic increase in the amount of time children and youth spend with media: an average of more than 7 ½ hours per day outside of school, according to recent research done by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Used well, the media can entertain and inform our children in positive ways. However, since most children aren't taught to use media thoughtfully, many media messages negatively contribute to public health issues such as poor body image, obesity, bullying and aggression, low self-esteem, depression, risky sexual behavior, and substance abuse, among other problems.

Media literacy education – which teaches students to apply critical thinking to media messages and to use media to create their own messages – is a key 21st century skill, critical to the health and well-being of America’s children, as well as to their future participation in the civic and economic life of our democracy.
The (your state’s bill) can help ensure our children get Media Literacy education. It is currently under consideration by the ( ) Committee, and I strongly support its passage.

I’m asking you, as my elected official, to (the action you are asking for – whether to ask for a hearing, ask for a bill to move out of committee, ask the Senate president or Speaker of the House to bring the bill up for a vote, or to vote in favor of a bill. MLN can help you with this).

Thank you for your consideration.

Signature
Name
Address
**PHONE SCRIPT**

A phone call is another way to get the attention of your legislators and their aides. You can call initially, or as a follow-up to a letter or email. In the call, explain our mission and ask for a meeting. If you leave a message and don't hear back within a week, call again.

*Phone Script:*

My name is (your name), (give your address if you are a constituent) and I’m a member of the (state) Media Literacy Now chapter.

More and more people are joining our chapter because they’re extremely concerned about the increased exposure our children have to unhealthy media.

TV, movies, ads, Internet access and video games subject them to repeated violence, adult sexuality and manipulative consumerism.

I’d like to speak with you about a potential solution that’s taking off on a state-by-state basis: comprehensive Media Literacy education. This gives our schools the tools to teach critical thinking skills about media. We believe media literacy education is the most effective way to help our kids.

Several states have already begun to move forward and we can’t be left behind. Would you be able to schedule some time on your calendar to learn more about this local, growing movement and why it matters?
TALKING POINTS

The Problem:

● Without Media Literacy education in our state’s schools our children are at real risk.
● Child health experts say media exposure – from TV, ads, movies and computers – play a major factor in how kids understand themselves and their world, and how they should interact with it.
● Media expose children to sexualization, violence, bullying, gender stereotyping, and the marketing of unhealthy foods, alcohol and tobacco, as well as unrealistic appearance and wealth expectations.
● This media consumption influences children’s behavior and can contribute to aggression, violence and bullying, depression, body image issues, obesity, substance abuse, and other negative effects on physical and mental health.
● A great deal of academic research has proven the harmful links to media messages, as well as the effectiveness of media literacy education.
● Media literacy – learning to interpret media messages as well as to create our own media – is a critical skill for college and career in the 21st century.
● Currently organizations, schools and individual teachers are working to bring media literacy to students. But media literacy is rarely part of the public debate on education.
● We need broad-based media literacy education urgently and the way to get there is public policy change. That’s why we need to put media literacy education on the agenda.
TALKING POINTS continued

Reactive:

(If there is a setback)

- Getting media literacy on the agenda is our mission! We are successful because the issue is on the table and people are thinking about it.

(To answer the comment that it’s one more thing on the teachers’ plate)

- Teachers recognize that this is needed, they see the very real effects of too much media, unhealthy media, and lack of critical analysis. But they are often fighting their administration, which determines what will be taught. The administration is responding to the state’s demands. We are trying to alter the state’s priorities to help give teachers the room to teach what they recognize needs to be taught.
- The teachers are in favor. The teachers’ union (if true) is an endorser of the bill.
- Media literacy is a “pedagogy.” It’s a skill set. We are talking about a method of teaching, not a subject area. Media literacy can be incorporated into any subject. It’s not “one more thing” but a change in the way children are educated to ensure they are prepared for work and life.
- Some school systems already recognize that media literacy is written into the Common Core standards and those districts are moving forward to incorporate critical analysis of all types of media, including popular culture. Schools that don’t, risk falling behind the schools that are doing a better job preparing their students for work and life in the 21st century.

About MEDIA LITERACY NOW

- Media Literacy Now provides policy and advocacy information, expertise and resources to help develop state laws enacting media literacy education in schools.
- Media literacy advocacy empowers grassroots groups of parents and concerned individuals like us to help bring classroom curriculum to local schools through our individual state chapters.
WORKING WITH THE NEWS MEDIA

Members of the news media are always looking to tell a good story. We have one. When community members approach the media in a logical, friendly and informative way good relationships can occur and our story stands a good chance of being told.

We want to develop strong communications with the media, to keep them updated on what is occurring, and to serve as subject matter experts on media literacy legislation. There are ways in which we can engage the press into running stories.

*Media Relations Tips:*

1) Develop all the elements that a reporter would need to tell the Media Literacy Now legislation story. These are:
   - A local family, struggling with the impact of media on their children, available for interview.
   - A concise overview of where the legislation/mission is now and what is needed to get it passed.
   - A Media Literacy Now spokesperson – and a local legislator if they are truly standing as a champion for the legislation – also available for interview.

2) Contact your local papers and broadcast outlets. Ask for the assignment desk. Tell them briefly what the issue is and offer the story elements if they are interested in covering it. Busy newsrooms are more likely to be willing to cover a story if all the pieces are in place for them.

3) If they don’t bite, search through local papers and broadcast outlets. Find stories about, or related to, children and media, or media literacy. Seek out the reporters or editors who have covered these stories. Let them know what is happening locally. Explain why it’s important. Ask them to consider covering this.
WORKING WITH THE MEDIA continued

4) Follow local reporters/anchors on Twitter and/or blogs. See what they’re saying. Judiciously comment on relevant tweets and posts and let them get to know you in a positive way. Ask them if they are interested in the legislation on media literacy that’s gaining steam. If they are, ask where you can send them info. Give them a chance to look everything over and then follow up with a call or email to see if they’d like to pursue it. Again, have all your story elements ready for them.

5) If you are holding an event or activity you can notify the media through a media advisory (ahead of time) or press release (day of). News desks prefer them in the body of an email (they won’t open attachments because of viruses) or via fax.

Media Advisory
If you have an activity scheduled you can send your local media outlets a Media Advisory. It is short and details only the facts.

Press Release
On the day of an event a press release gives a reporter the information needed to tell the story. Make the headline stand out. The first sentence or two will drive interest in the release.

Both Media Advisories and Press Releases are only used for activities.

Here are customizable templates – filled with writing tips – for both a Media Advisory and a Press Release. Fill the spaces in with your current information.

REMEMBER TO TAKE THE PAGE NUMBERS FROM OUR TOOLKIT OFF THE BOTTOM!
Media Advisory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Time) 9 A.M. EDT, September 23, 2014

Use “News Hook” Headline to Announce Event: Arial, 14 Pt, Title Case
Give secondary information in optional subhead: 12 pt. Times New Roman
Italic

[CITY, ST, Month date, year] – Notify media of a news event at least 3-4 days before the event with a Media Advisory. (Note: Send a Media Alert the day before the event, as a reminder.) The headline and optional subhead are often enough to explain the event. If not, include information in the first paragraph about the news that will take place to attract media interest. Don't provide enough information that the media can “scoop” the event without attending. Limit a media advisory to one page.

**WHAT:** Description of event written in unique, newsworthy way.

Spokespersons (e.g. **Bold Name**, lower case title, Organization/Company Name)

**WHO:**

**WHEN:** Day, date (e.g. Tuesday, August 29, 2006)

Time (e.g. 11:30 a.m. to noon)

**WHERE:** Exact address of event; include directions if necessary.

*Media Literacy Now is the leading advocacy organization for state-level media literacy education. Through grassroots support and resources for state-by-state media literacy legislation we empower people to push for – and win – comprehensive media literacy education for their state’s children.*

– END –
Press Release

Contact: You
Phone: 
Email: 

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(time)9 A.M. EDT, March 3, 2014

Short Active Verb Headline: 14 Point Arial, Title Case
Interesting subhead in 12 point Times New Roman italic, sentence case (optional)
CITY, St., Month date, year – Present new, factual information in concise, conversational language. Strive for active verbs, well-chosen adjectives and – above all – new information that will expand the reader’s understanding. Develop a hook or story angle that will appeal to a newsdesk. Limit the first paragraph to 1-3 sentences.

A successful news release first “grabs” the reader with information he or she will find compelling. Using a direct quotation from a subject matter expert in the second paragraph, expanding on – but not repeating! – the first paragraph, will lend authority to the lead. Cover “who, what, when, where, why and how” facts in the second or third paragraph.

Incorporate related key messages to ensure overall themes are emphasized consistently. Use short, simple sentences and active voice to avoid a bureaucratic tone. “Speak” to your family, not your boss.

“Use a quote in the second or third paragraph,” said Bob Smith, Media Literacy Now - MORE -

Chapter President. “That way you include a subject matter expert on the record with some of this information.” A second quote can also be used via a person who has direct knowledge of the product/service/activity in further paragraphs, spaced at least one paragraph from each other.

A bulleted list may be useful to separate and highlight important facts.

▪ Use bullet points when providing tips or advice. For editors and readers scanning copy, this can get their attention and draw them into the story.

▪ Format news releases in 11 point Times New Roman, single-spaced and aligned left. Add one line space between paragraphs. Format dateline in 11 point Times New Roman bold. Include the city (all uppercase letters), abbreviated state name, month, date and year. Separate with commas as above and use an en dash before presenting newsworthy information. (Note: 30 U.S. cities stand alone without state; territories and eight states not abbreviated. See AP Stylebook for list.)

▪ Consult the Associated Press Style Guide and follow AP writing style. Use an “inverted pyramid” format: Present information in descending order of importance.
• Make it easy for the reader to get more information. Include Web site address and chapter or service delivery site locations and hotline number with hours of operation. Phone numbers, including toll-free numbers, are now listed with hyphens only, per AP style. Do not use periods or parentheses with phone numbers.

• All news releases are typically edited, reviewed and approved prior to release.

Strive to keep a news release to one or two pages. If a news release exceeds one page, the last line of text on the first page should be followed by one line of space and “– MORE –” centered in bold face.

Media Literacy Now is the leading advocacy organization for state-level media literacy education. Through grassroots support and resources for state-by-state media literacy legislation we empower people to push for – and win – comprehensive media literacy education for their state’s children.

-MEDIA RELATIONS continued-

Letters to the Editor

We also have the opportunity to voice our own ideas and opinions by submitting commentary or Letters to the Editor.

Sample Letter to the Editor

(DATE)

Why Media Literacy Curriculum Matters

Through media exposure, our children view multiple acts of violence each week. They feel pressured to act and look older than they are. The values, behaviors and thinking they discover through TV, movies and online may be vastly different from what they learn at home. And yet, they feel enormous pressure to identify with and accept a youth culture created by media – and to buy the products associated with it.

It’s not as easy as turning off the TV. Media surrounds us everyday, from computers to billboards to commercials at movie theatres. We
adults make decisions about what and how much media we use. Our children need to learn how to do this, too, just as they learn math, spelling and other skills that will enable them to succeed in life.

As a (parent/educator/concerned citizen) and a member of the (state) chapter of Media Literacy Now I believe that a school curriculum inclusive of media literacy will ensure that our students have an opportunity to develop critical thinking skills in this area.

(Add personal information about what is needed in your state.)

Please join me in writing to our state legislators, asking that we give our state’s children a chance to develop media literacy skills as part of their total education by supporting (the bill).

(Your Name and town)
SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media offers powerful resources allowing us to effectively connect our messages with media, legislators, influencers, other parents/educators and the public. Using social media strategically provides the most powerful impact.

To do that we need to develop and create content that is concise and well messaged. And, we want to share it across all kinds of social platforms. They include:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google+
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- YouTube (you may not have content for this right away)

Start by setting up a state chapter account on all these sites. You can use the handle MediaLitNow with your state’s two letter abbreviation at the end e.g. MediaLitNowMA. Invite all your members and encourage them to invite their friends, family and networks.

Messages:

Think about the big picture of what we need users to understand about media literacy curriculum. Gear your writing around this. There are a number of points that we want to share. It’s good to organize them so that we share them all in an organized way.

We want to write our messages out in ways that can be easy to read and make sense for each social platform that we’re on. Start by developing messages that touch all the points you want to share. Include #hashtags such as #medialiteracy #edu #parents and your state abbreviation: #MA #NJ #NY #MD #TX
SOCIAL MEDIA continued

Start with the following messages: (you can include a link to your state page)

*Social Media Messages*

- TV, movies and computers can seriously affect our kids. We need #MediaLiteracy education to help them.
- We need comprehensive #MediaLiteracy education to empower our children.
- TV, Computers, and Ads – Our kids need help navigating through the negatives.
- Join our movement to put #MediaLiteracy education into our state’s schools.
- New research shows #MediaLiteracy education reduces risky or antisocial behaviors and increases belief in oneself to avoid negative behaviors.
- #Medialiteracy is effective for kids of all ages in combating unhealthy messages about sex, violence and substances.
- #Medialiteracy helps kids produce their own positive messages.
- #Medialiteracy is a key element of literacy in the 21st century.
- Help us bring #MediaLiteracy curriculum to (your state) by (your mission).

*Visuals:*

- Use our Media Literacy Now logo for your profile picture.
- Take pictures of kids (with parental permission) using print media or digital devices.
- Take pictures of students in media literacy classes or creating media.
- Shoot video of any legislative hearings, press conferences, parents talking about the problem, media literacy classes in action, etc.
SOCIAL MEDIA continued

Posting:
Gear each message for the social media platform you are using but remember, shorter is usually better. For instance, research shows the ideal length of a Facebook post is less than 40 characters. Keep it short, and add a link. On Instagram and Pinterest the visuals are key. If you’re not sure of the style or conventions of each platform, take time to listen and observe first. You can retweet and repost from the MLN main Twitter and Pinterest accounts.

Manage:
Follow your posts, see who is commenting and sharing. Thank them and ask them what they think of Media Literacy education. Develop conversations and engage people in our mission. Ask them to sign up for newsletters at the website. This will grow your state support. Reach out to reporters and legislators, too.

Build your communities by posting every day, adding followers, commenting on their posts and becoming an engaged member of each network. Strive for a personal touch so you seem human, but remember to stay on message! Eventually, you will become a go-to resource for media literacy education.
LEGISLATIVE ACTION PACKET

After you visit a legislator or aide it’s important to leave an informational packet behind. It is an actual hard copy packet that helps the office remember you and the issues. It also documents the action needed in your state.

It’s easy to assemble the packet with pocket folders.

You can print up labels with the MLN logo and put them on the front cover.

Make sure your name, “Media Literacy Now,” and your contact info is on every page.

Use the templates below. (REMEMBER TO REMOVE THE PAGE NUMBERS!) Some are ready to be used. Others will need to be customized by you. Add local stories and facts within the contents of the packet. Place the Need page on the left and Legislative Solutions on top of the other documents. These are the first thing we want visible since they may not read the whole packet.

Here are the page topics:

1. The Need
2. Legislative Solutions
3. What People are Saying
   (start collecting quotes from people in your state)
4. About Media Literacy Now

Eventually you may be able to add photos, or a video on a cd.

When you have a sponsor, we have a sample bill summary and fact sheet that can be customized for the legislator to send to colleagues.
The Need

TV, movies, ads, Internet access and video games subject our state’s children to repeated violence, unhealthy sexuality and manipulative consumerism. They are surrounded by it and this exposure is often uncontrolled.

The consequences upon the mental and physical health of children are enormous. An American Psychological Foundation study found that “early exposure to TV violence places both male and female children at risk for the development of aggressive and violent behavior in adulthood.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics also ties this to “sexual behavior, substance use, disordered eating, and academic difficulties.”

Kids use media for an average 7 hours a day. We know how this is harmful for our children and their futures. We have to act now to keep them safe and to mitigate the damages this exposure may cause on behaviors that could potentially harm society, as well.
Legislative Solutions

A recent article in the Journal of Communications reported that Media Literacy education was found to reduce risky or antisocial behaviors, increase negative beliefs about and negative attitudes toward those behaviors, and increase a child’s belief in his/herself to avoid negative behaviors. Media literacy education was found to be effective for children and youth of all ages and for all topics including tobacco, violence and sex.

Legislation is now the critical step in protecting children from the damaging effects of media. A growing movement is afoot across the state to create and pass legislation supporting Media Literacy education.

(Describe what specifics are needed in your state.)
What People are Saying

I believe this is a crucial piece of an education for our children so that they can learn to distinguish between facts and hype, truth and fiction. –Parent

I think media literacy is one of the most important skills needed to thrive and be happy in our environment. –Lawyer

I am the father of a 3-year-old and definitely concerned about the information that he receives and the manner that he gets it. I have been absolutely amazed at the amount of information that is pushed on him at such a young age. –Parent

The United States is the world’s largest producer of media but media literacy has never been part of its school curricula. We're just raising our children to be consumers of these texts. Media literacy helps all children deconstruct and reconstruct texts. Media literacy and multimedia production repositions children as researchers of dominant ideologies and creators of culture. Thank you for your work on this bill. –Professor

I know how important this legislation is to helping girls cope in this difficult social and political environment. –CEO/Girl Scouts
About Media Literacy Now

Media Literacy Now (medialiteracynow.org) is the leading advocacy organization for state-level media literacy education. Through grassroots support and resources for state-by-state media literacy legislation we empower people to push for – and win – comprehensive media literacy education for their state’s children.

Through MLN state chapters, grassroots groups of parents, educators and concerned citizens are actively working to ensure that Media Literacy curriculum becomes a reality.

The national office of Media Literacy Now is headquartered in the Boston Massachusetts area. Here is our contact information:

Media Literacy Now, Inc.
15 Main Street Suite 102
Watertown MA 02472
(617) 744-9563

Erin McNeill is the Founder & President of Media Literacy Now.
About Media Literacy Now

(Chapter)

(Describe your state advocacy goals and work, your supporters, and your progress.)