



**Autism Society**  
of North Carolina



# Advocacy 101

Making your voice heard on issues that are important to you

The Autism Society of North Carolina (ASNC) works directly to improve the lives of individuals and families affected by autism through advocacy, training and education, and direct services. Advocacy is at the heart of what we do. As the leading resource for autism in North Carolina, we connect families to resources, assist with school issues, educate through workshops, help individuals navigate the services system, and host local support groups. We also give those with autism a voice in public policy by maintaining relationships at the state legislature and other policy-making entities.

## About the toolkit

While ASNC advocates on behalf of people with autism and their families, it is critical for people to advocate for themselves. Making your voice heard on issues that are important to you is the focus of this handbook.

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## Beyond the toolkit

If you would like more information or to receive an advocacy training session in your area, contact Jennifer Mahan, Director of Public Policy, at [jmahan@autismsociety-nc.org](mailto:jmahan@autismsociety-nc.org) or 919-865-5068. For our email newsletter, Policy Pulse, sign up here: [www.autismsociety-nc.org/contact-us](http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/contact-us). ASNC also posts regular articles about public policy issues on our blog: [www.autismsociety-nc.org/blog](http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/blog).

# Public Policy Goals

The Autism Society of North Carolina advocates for public policy targets with an emphasis on the state of North Carolina continuing its public investments to ensure quality, accountable service, and support systems that focus on community settings and make sure that people with Autism Spectrum Disorder achieve a good quality of life.

**ASNC's current priorities fall into three broad focus areas:**

- People with autism live in and contribute to their communities.
- People with autism have opportunities for growth and are not left behind their peers.
- People with autism are treated justly.

You can read the details of our policy priorities at [www.autismsociety-nc.org/public-policy-priorities](http://www.autismsociety-nc.org/public-policy-priorities).

## Why Me?

YOU can do something. Legislators represent us. They need to hear from us – self-advocates, families, and people who serve those on the autism spectrum. They need to hear the life stories of people with autism – and the services and supports they need to live as citizens in North Carolina.

ASNC believes that government works better with people taking action: telling policymakers what is needed, voting in elections, participating in town halls, visiting the legislature, making phone calls, and writing letters are just a few of the ways you can take action.

### ME? Yes, YOU!

- You know how the system works and doesn't work.
- You know the good and the bad.
- You are an expert in the area of autism.
- You know what happens when you or a family member or friend does not get the services and supports they need.

Do what you are comfortable with, when you have the time – some is better than none.

**Your legislators look to YOU to educate them.**

**We need your voice or written word, because you, the local constituents who know about autism, are the ones legislators need to hear from.**

# Who Are My Legislators?

Contact your  
STATE legislators  
for autism issues in  
North Carolina.

## You have many legislators.

Federal legislators work in Washington, DC, as representatives or senators.

State legislators, who serve in Raleigh at the General Assembly, make decisions about your autism services and supports.

You can find who represents you and their contact information at [www.ncleg.net](http://www.ncleg.net). Click on "Find Your Legislators" at the top. This page will give you information about all your federal and state elected officials. Put your address in each map to find your exact district number and the person who represents that district.

- The North Carolina House of Representatives map is for your state legislators who are elected to the NC General Assembly's House.
- The North Carolina Senate map is for your state legislators who are elected to the NC General Assembly's Senate.
- The US House of Representatives map is for federal legislators who are elected to Congress in the House.
- The US senators who represent you in Congress can be found on the US Senate website: [www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm?State=NC](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm?State=NC)

Your members of Congress have offices in Washington, DC, as well as in North Carolina. Check with each individual member for ways to email them, to find their local offices, and their mailing addresses.

State legislators' Raleigh offices are either in the Legislative Building or the Legislative Office Building. Three-digit office numbers such as "302" are in the Legislative Office Building. Four-digit offices such as "2206" are in the Legislative Building. (Your legislators also have offices in your local area; go to [www.ncleg.net](http://www.ncleg.net) to find their local offices.) Following are the street addresses for the two buildings.

Legislative Building  
300 N. Salisbury Street  
Raleigh, NC 27601-1096

Legislative Office Building  
16 West Jones Street  
Raleigh, NC 27601-1096

If you are writing to legislators' Raleigh offices, be sure to include the office number in the address as well as their name and chamber. Letters to House members are addressed to "House of Representatives" and letters to Senate member to "NC Senate."

For example:

Senator Just A. Tarheel  
NC Senate  
Legislative Office Building, Suite 101  
300 N. Salisbury St.  
Raleigh, NC 27601-1096

Representative OI D. Northstate  
House of Representatives  
Legislative Building, Suite 1515  
16 W. Jones St.  
Raleigh, NC 27601-1096

# Write to Your Legislators

A personal letter will have a big impact on legislators. (Traditional mail and email are both good!) You can ask a family member or friend to help you write a letter, but make sure to use your words.

## How to write a letter (you need only four items):

1. Tell who you are and where you live
2. Tell the problem
3. Tell why you are concerned (personal story)
4. Give your solution or ask for help

It is important to tell your personal story and why this is important to you. Keep your letter to one page. Keep your letter to one topic or issue. This is because too many issues may overwhelm your legislator. We want to empower our legislators to make good changes, not get overwhelmed and give up because they feel it is too much for them to do.

## Some additional tips for writing legislators:

- Make sure your address, phone number, and email address are in the letter, so your legislator can write a response or call you.
- Tell your legislator the town/city and county where you live.
- Always tell the truth. No elaborations.
- If you know the bill number and title, be sure to refer to it in your letter.
- Always be nice. Your legislator may not agree with you on this topic, but they will continue to be your legislator and will work on many other issues now and in the future.
- Write a thank-you note if your legislator votes as you asked. Or write a thank you after a visit or a phone call to thank them for their time and attention to the issue.
- Be sure to address the elected official properly. See Appendix B for help.
- The governor is addressed as The Honorable Governor First name Surname of NC.
- Often, letters to legislators are addressed to "The Honorable (name of senator or representative)." And then "Senator \_\_\_\_\_" or "Representative \_\_\_\_\_" is used in the greeting. Many people simply use "Senator \_\_\_\_\_" or "Representative \_\_\_\_\_" in the address and greeting. Either is okay. The important thing is to write! See the letter below for an example.

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## The 4 items that make an effective letter:

1. Tell who you are and where you live
2. Tell the problem
3. Tell why you are concerned (personal story)
4. Give your solution or ask for help

[Write Your Legislators continued]

- You can find your legislators and their contact information at [www.ncleg.net](http://www.ncleg.net), as described in the previous section, "Who Are My Legislators?"
- When the General Assembly is in session, send letters and emails to your legislator's Raleigh office.
- When the legislators are not in session, send letter and emails to their home office or Raleigh office addresses.
- Don't know whether legislators are in session or not? Check [www.ncleg.net](http://www.ncleg.net) or contact Jennifer Mahan, Director of Public Policy, at [jmahan@autismsociety-nc.org](mailto:jmahan@autismsociety-nc.org).

## Sample letter/email to a legislator

Make sure you tell your story. It's important for your message to have a **BIG IMPACT**, but stay brief and to the point. Try to keep the letter to one page. You can also use the letter text in an email.

Your street address  
City, state, zip code  
Phone number  
date

The Honorable name  
Address

Dear Representative/Senator last name,

On behalf of my child, my family and others with autism, I am writing to ask you to fund supports and services for people with I/DD, including autism, in the state's budget. Please ensure that the budget includes funding for increased Innovations waiver slots and single stream funds to the MCOs for those not getting other services.

These services are critical to my family and others in North Carolina with autism. [Give a brief description of the types of services you have and how they help. If you don't have services/supports, describe the challenges of that, and what it would mean if you did. If you are on a waiting list, mention the length of time.]

I realize that you are faced with many tough decisions as you prepare the state's budget. As someone who understand the challenges faced by those with autism, their families, I would urge you to invest in services and supports that ensure people can live in and contribute to their communities. Please let me know your position on making these investments in people with autism.

Sincerely,

Your name

This is your "ask." You can insert other issues here: funding for special education, supportive housing, employment supports, day programs, etc.

This is where you can talk about your hopes for the future: what do you want life to be like for you, your child, your family? Give some examples.

# Call Your Legislators

Calling your legislators is another good way to communicate your concerns about autism issues. Here are some tips on calling legislators.

## Before you call

- Write down the main points that you want to include in your conversation.
  1. Tell who you are and where you live
  2. Tell the problem
  3. Tell why you are concerned (personal story)
  4. Give your solution or ask for help
- Practice what you are going to say. Keep it short, five minutes or less.
- Be prepared to answer questions and provide additional information.

(It is okay to say you don't know the answer to a legislator's question. It gives you an opportunity to get the correct information and contact them again. Tell them you will get an answer for them. Be sure to follow up.)

## During the call

- Ask to speak directly to the legislator. But if the legislator is not available, leave a brief message with his/her office and ask that they call you back.
- Identify yourself and where you are from (city, county).
- Be brief. State the reason for your call.
- Always tell the truth. No elaborations.
- Express your appreciation if the legislator is in favor of your issue.
- If you know the bill number and title, be sure to refer to it in your conversation.
- Remember to be nice, even if the legislator doesn't agree with you.
- Thank the legislator for his/her time.
- Get voicemail? Leave a phone number where you can be reached. Ask to speak to the legislative assistant and tell them the same things you would tell the legislator.

## After the call, send a follow-up letter

- Restate the reason for the call.
- State what you think the legislator's opinion is on the issue.
- State your appreciation if the legislator is in favor of the issue or state your hope that the legislator will choose to vote or act in favor if he or she is against or undecided.
- Thank the legislator for his or her time.

**Make sure you tell your story during your phone conversation. It's important for your message to have a BIG IMPACT, but stay brief and to the point.**

## Sample script for a call to a legislator

“ Senator/Representative last name, my name is your name and I am a resident of city in county. I am calling today to ask your support for increasing access to services for people on the autism spectrum in the state budget.

When our child was diagnosed with autism, we were surprised to find that there is a ten-year wait for services that would help ensure he/she continues to develop and grow. With these services, he/she could provide some explanation of what these treatments have enabled them to do, or could enable them to do and what happens without them. Keep your points brief.

There are thousands more like me who have kids on the spectrum and are struggling to get help. These services are critically important to us. I realize that you are faced with many tough decisions. But this should be easy – ensuring that children are able to develop, grow, and become contributing members our state.

“What is your position on eliminating the waiting list?” Or, “What is your position on ensuring that people with autism get access to services now?” ”

### Give the legislator an opportunity to express his/her opinion without interruption.

- If the legislator indicates that he/she will vote **in favor** of the bill or supports your position, thank him/her.
- If the legislator indicates that he/she is **undecided or against** the legislation, politely ask the legislator to reconsider and state again how important it is for you and your family.
- **Offer to meet** with the legislator or provide additional information about the impact of treatments and insurance coverage for autism, if you feel comfortable and have the ability to do so.
- For questions you can't answer, offer to find the answers. (You can contact the Autism Society of North Carolina for help.)
- Offer the legislator your name and phone number in case he/she has additional questions at a later time, if you feel comfortable.
- Thank the legislator for his/her time.

Remember to follow up your phone call with a thank-you letter.



# Visit Your Legislators

A face-to-face meeting with your legislators is an excellent opportunity to discuss autism, legislation, increasing services in the budget, or other issues that affect you and your family. While it's great to meet in person with legislators, some may be offering video calls. If it would be easier for you to meet via video (family or work obligations, difficulty with travel, health reasons, etc.), please consider requesting that option. The following guidelines may be helpful as you begin visiting your legislators.

## How to make an appointment

- Locate contact information from the General Assembly website, [www.ncleg.net](http://www.ncleg.net), as described in the previous section, "Who Are My Legislators?"
- Call the office to make an appointment.
  - ❖ When the General Assembly (GA) is in session, call your legislator's Raleigh office.
  - ❖ When the GA is not in session, call the home office address or the Raleigh office.
  - ❖ Don't know whether legislators are in session or not? Try both phone numbers or check the legislative website.
  - ❖ Your US representative or senator might have a different way of handling visits. Some ask for emails, some faxes, and some phone calls. Check your legislator's website for more info or call 202-224-3121 locally or toll-free, 1-800-962-3524.

## Before your visit

- Write down the main points that you want to include in your conversation.
  1. Tell who you are and where you live
  2. Tell the problem
  3. Tell why you are concerned (personal story)
  4. Give your solution or ask for help
- Practice what you are going to say. Try to keep it short, no more than five minutes.
- Be prepared to answer questions and provide additional information.
- It is okay to say you don't know the answer to a legislator's question. It gives you an opportunity to get the correct information and a reason to contact them again. Tell them you will get an answer for them. Be sure to follow up.

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## It is best to make an appointment.

Legislators are very busy, so it is best you call ahead to make sure they will have time to speak with you and listen to you.

### *[Visit Your Legislators continued]*

- Know where your legislator's office is located.
  - ❖ If you are meeting your legislator at the local office, you are in luck! It is probably the easiest and best place to meet. Check with Federal and State legislators' staff and websites about office locations and nearby parking.
  - ❖ If you are meeting your state legislator in Raleigh, there are two buildings that have legislators' offices: the Legislative Building and the Legislative Office Building. If the room number has four digits, such as 4444, then it is located in the Legislative Building. If the room number has three digits, such as 333, then it is located in the Legislative Office Building.
  - ❖ Arrive early so you can park, go through security screening, and find your legislator's office. It can be a little difficult at first. Paid parking is located around the buildings.
  - ❖ Check the NCGA website for visitor info including hours, prohibited items, and parking maps: [www.ncleg.gov/About/VisitorInfo](http://www.ncleg.gov/About/VisitorInfo)
  - ❖ Don't be late to your appointment. You want as much time as possible to get to know your legislator.
- Dress neatly.
- If your child is the one receiving services, take your child, if appropriate, to the meeting or take pictures of your child and family so the legislator can put a face to the issue.

## During the visit

- Identify yourself and where you are from (city, county).
- Be brief. (See the sample phone call or letter to organize your thoughts)
- Always tell the truth. No elaborations.
- Express your appreciation, if the legislator is in favor of your issue.
- If you know the bill number and title, be sure to refer to it in your conversation.
- Leave information for the legislator to review after your meeting.
- Leave your contact information.
- Remember to be nice, even if the legislator doesn't agree with you.
- Thank the legislator for his/her time.

## After the visit, send a follow-up letter

- Restate the reason for your visit.
- Restate what you think the legislator's opinion is on the issue.
- State your appreciation if the legislator is in favor or state your hope that the legislator will choose to vote in favor (if he/she is against or undecided).
- Thank the legislator for his/her time.

Again, make sure you tell your story. It's important for your message to have a BIG IMPACT, but stay brief and to the point.

# Your Legislator's Viewpoint

## Your legislator...

- **May know nothing about autism:** Unless your representative is a member of the Legislative Oversight Committee for DHHS, the Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee, or has had personal and family experiences with autism, your representative probably knows little or nothing about your concerns. Share your knowledge.
- **Knows that “all politics is local.”** This quote from former US House Speaker Tip O’Neill means that legislators’ most important interest is their home district and their constituents. That is who they listen to most, and that is why local contacts from home are most effective.
- **Wants to do the right thing:** Each of us wants to do a good job; that includes legislators.
- **Often wants to get re-elected:** Most public officials want to continue their work to serve their constituents and to do that, they need to stay in office.
- **Wants to be responsive:** Your legislator is in the business of pleasing people and wants to accommodate you – but not at any cost. Other considerations may prevent him/her from doing so.
- **Experiences conflicting pressures:** It is difficult for legislators to know what to do; everyone feels their issue is top priority.
- **Wants to know how legislation affects the local district:** This is where YOU ARE IMPORTANT. You can show how a bill affects the people back home. Be specific and use real-life examples.
- **Finds it hard to vote against a friend but easy to vote against someone they don’t know:** Votes in the legislature often take money from one program to give to another. Unless your representatives know the impact on programs and services in their/YOUR district, it’s easy to accept the argument that those programs don’t need funding. For issues that don’t directly involve money, they may be voting against powerful interests, including old friends, or they may be going against the ideology of their political party. Many times, they are looking for a way to support you, while still remaining true to their ideals.

## So That is Being an Advocate

And that is all it takes to start your journey in advocacy. Pick and choose the methods you like. Begin with small goals, such as writing a letter or making a call, then work toward developing a relationship with your legislators by sending birthday cards, holiday cards, and thank-you notes when you see your legislator’s good work in the newspapers; meeting; calling, etc.

Over time, you will find your legislator will start calling and emailing YOU for information about potential bills and legislative actions.

Best of luck, and THANK YOU!

# Appendix A: Terms to Know

**Amendment:** A proposed change to the language in a bill by adding, substituting, or omitting a portion of the legislation before final passage.

**Appropriation:** Legislation that funds an agency or program by directing the expenditure of money from the Budget Office.

**Authorization:** Legislation that authorizes or permits the expenditure of funds for an agency or program, with the actual spending to be approved by the appropriations committees.

**Bill:** Legislation introduced in either the House or the Senate. House bills are designated by the prefix "H.B.," Senate bills by "S.B.," and then followed by the bill number. Bill numbers are determined by the order in which bills are introduced.

**Caucus:** A meeting of members of the same political party or a common interest to determine the group's position on legislative issues.

**Committee:** A subdivision of the House and Senate that prepares legislation for action by the parent chamber. Each committee has jurisdiction over certain subject matters and considers legislation pertaining to their jurisdiction. Most committees are further subdivided into subcommittees. There are several types of committees:

1. Standing committees are permanent committees with a particular legislative jurisdiction.
2. Joint Committees have members from both the House and the Senate.
3. Study or Oversight Committees are formed to look at a particular issue and often meet when the legislative body is not in session. These committees may be temporary or standing.

**Committee Process:** Once bills are introduced, they are referred to one of the committees where hearings are held and amendments are considered. The committee reports its recommendations to the legislative body.

**Conference Committee:** A committee made up of members from both chambers. Its purpose is to resolve the differences between the House and Senate version of a bill.

**Constituent:** Any citizen residing in a district or state represented by a representative or a senator.

**Continuing Appropriation:** When a fiscal year begins and the legislature has not yet enacted all regular appropriation bills for that year, it passes a joint resolution "continuing appropriation" for government agencies at rates generally based on the previous year's appropriations.

**Co-sponsor:** One who joins in sponsoring legislation. Co-sponsorship is a public demonstration of support for a measure.

**Executive Session:** A meeting of a Senate or House committee (or occasionally of either chamber) that only its members may attend.

**Expenditures:** The actual spending of money, as distinguished from the appropriation of it.

**Filibuster:** A time-delaying tactic used by a minority in an effort to prevent a vote on a bill that probably would pass if brought to a vote.

**Fiscal Year:** The state's annual accounting period, which in North Carolina begins July 1 and ends the following June 30. The fiscal year is designated by the year in which it ends.

**H.B.:** The initials "H.B." before the number designate a bill originating in the House.

**Hearings:** A session of a legislative committee at which supporters and opponents express their views. The committee usually announces hearings from one day to many weeks in advance and may invite certain persons to testify. Persons who request to testify may be turned down by the committee, but they are often allowed to appear in person or submit a written statement for the record.

**Introduction:** The original presentation of a bill.

**Joint Committee:** A committee made up of members of both the House and Senate.

**Joint Resolution:** Just like a bill, a joint resolution requires the approval of both chambers and has the force of law if approved. Joint resolutions are generally used in dealing with limited matters, such as a single appropriation for a specific purpose or the recognition of an individual.

**Marking Up a Bill:** Going through a measure, usually in subcommittee and committee, taking it section by section, revising language, and penciling in new phrases. If the bill is extensively revised, the new version may be introduced as a separate or "clean bill" with a new number.

**Majority Leader:** Floor leader, spokesperson, and strategist for the majority party.

**Minority Leader:** Floor leader for the minority party.

**Ranking Member:** The most senior member of a committee from a particular party. Most often used to refer to the most senior member of the minority party.

**Recommittal:** Sending a bill back to the committee that reported it for consideration. In the legislature, it may be referred to as "Re-referral."

**Report:** Both a verb and a noun. A committee that has examined a bill refers it to the parent chamber by "reporting" its views and recommendations regarding the measure. A "report" describes the purpose and scope of a bill, along with supporting reasons. Opposing views as well as supplemental views of other members of the committee may be included.

**Resolution:** A resolution deals with matters entirely within the prerogatives of one chamber. It does not require passage by the other chamber and does not carry the force of law. Most resolutions deal with the rules of a chamber or are used to express the sentiments of a single house.

**Rule:** House or Senate rules governing the conduct of business. Also, a "rule" issued by the House Rules Committee on procedure for handling House bills.

**S.B.:** The initials "S.B." before the number designate a bill originating in the Senate.

**Sessions:** In North Carolina, the General Assembly typically meets for two sessions, with the long session beginning in January and ending when the legislature adjourns (odd years) and a short session (even years) that begins in May and goes until the legislature adjourns. Congress meets on a different schedule.

**Sponsor:** The member of the legislature who introduces legislation. Sometimes called a "primary sponsor."

**Standing Committee:** A committee that studies measures introduced within its jurisdiction and makes recommendations to its respective chamber concerning appropriate action.

**Subcommittee:** A subdivision of a committee organized by subject matter.

**Substitute:** A motion, amendment, or entire bill that is introduced in place of pending legislation. Passage of a substitute kills the original measure.

**Suspend the Rules:** A motion to expedite passage of legislation whereby any member recognized by the Speaker may "move to suspend the rules and pass the bill." This requires a two-thirds vote in the House and a majority in the Senate.

# Appendix B:

# Terms of Address

## for Selected Federal & State Officials

Government Official	Address	Salutation
<b>President of the US</b>	The President	Dear Sir or Madam
	The President and Mrs. _____ or	Mr. President or Madam President
	The President and Mr. _____	Dear Mr. President or Dear Madam President
<b>US Vice President</b>	The Vice President	Dear Sir or Madam
	The Vice President and Mrs. _____ or	Mr. Vice President or Madam Vice President
	The Vice President and Mr. _____	Dear Mr. Vice President or Dear Madam Vice President
<b>Attorney General</b>	The Hon. First name Surname	Dear Sir or Madam Dear Mr. or Ms. Attorney General
<b>Senator</b>	The Hon. or Sen. First name Surname	Dear Mr. or Madam Senator
		Dear Mr. or Ms. Surname
<b>Representative</b>	The Hon. or Rep. First name Surname	Dear Mr. or Madam Surname
<b>Speaker of the House</b>	The Hon. Speaker of the House of Representatives	Dear Mr. or Madam Speaker
<b>Governor</b>	The Hon. First name Surname, of State	Sir or Madam Dear Governor Surname
<b>Mayor</b>	The Hon. First name Surname, Mayor of City	Sir or Madam Dear Mayor Surname

# Appendix C: Civics 101: Your National, State & Local Elected Officials

## NATIONAL Government

<p><b>The Constitution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The constitution is the supreme law.</li> <li>• All laws and people must follow the Constitution.</li> <li>• It is the Constitution that establishes the roles of our nationally elected officials.</li> </ul>		<p>3 Branches of Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislative</li> <li>• Executive</li> <li>• Judicial</li> </ul>
<p><b>Legislative (makes laws)</b></p> <p><b>Congress (two houses)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each congressional period lasts two years.</li> <li>• Congress meets at the US Capitol in Washington, DC.</li> <li>• Congress is in session beginning Jan. 3 until they adjourn, often late in the calendar year.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Executive (carries out laws)</b></p> <p><b>President      Vice President</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforce the laws made by the US Congress</li> <li>• Both can serve for two terms; each term is four years.</li> <li>• Both work in Washington, DC.</li> </ul>	

<p>Houses of Congress</p>	<p><b>U.S. Senate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senators are elected every six years, which is called a term, and there are no term limits.</li> <li>• Primary duty of the US Senate is to make laws that affect all Americans.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each state gets two senators.</li> <li>• The US Senate has 100 senators.</li> <li>• NC has two senators who represent the whole state.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>U.S. House of Representatives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representatives are elected every two years, which is called a term, and there are no term limits.</li> <li>• Primary duty of the US House of Representatives is to make laws that affect all Americans.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each state gets a certain number of US representatives based on population.</li> <li>• NC currently has 13 representatives in DC. NC will add a 14th representative in 2022-2023.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Makes laws that affects ALL Americans:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health care reform</li> <li>• Insurance coverage for nationwide companies, self-insured companies, federal employees, or the military</li> <li>• Appropriation of federal funds including for Medicaid, education, Social Security, housing, and other government services</li> <li>• International affairs/ war and peace</li> <li>• Trade between states and between the US and other countries</li> <li>• National taxes and borrowing money</li> <li>• Approves the making of money</li> </ul>	<p><b>DOES NOT make laws that affect ONLY people in NC or locally:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The state's Medicaid plan: who is covered and how</li> <li>• Mental health, developmental disability, and substance abuse funding and priorities for the state</li> <li>• Local or neighborhood ordinances</li> <li>• State budget</li> <li>• State taxes</li> </ul>
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## STATE Government

### The State Constitution

- Each state has its own constitution based on its unique history, needs, philosophy, and geography.
- The laws made in individual states cannot conflict with the national Constitution or national laws.

### Legislative (makes laws)

#### General Assembly

The NC General Assembly (NCGA) meets every two years in Raleigh at 16 Jones Street.

- During odd years, the NCGA typically meets for a long session from January until July 1, but the session can run longer.
  - The primary goals of the long session are to create a two-year budget and consider numerous other policy-related bills.
- During the even years, the NCGA typically meets for a short session from May till July 1, but the session can run longer.
  - The primary goal of the short session is to re-evaluate the budget that was set the prior year. Some other bills may also be considered, but only if they involve money, or passed one chamber the previous year, or were recommended by a legislative committee.

#### House of Representatives

- NC is broken up into districts and each district has a certain number of House representatives based on the district's population.
- There are 120 House representatives in the NC General Assembly.
- The speaker of the house is elected by the members and oversees the House's work.
- The speaker is elected by members from their membership for a two-year term.
- The speaker's duties include maintaining order in the House and appointing members to standing committees.

#### Senate

- Each district has one senator. (This is not based on population.)
- There are 50 senators in the NC General Assembly.
- The lieutenant governor is president of the Senate and oversees the daily Senate Legislative Session.
- The lieutenant governor has no vote in the Senate except to break a tie.
- The President pro tempore is the leader of the Senate and is elected by the membership of the Senate.
- The President pro tempore appoints senators to the Senate Standing Committees.

#### Laws made by the NCGA (Any law that affects ALL North Carolinians)

- State's Medicaid plan: who is covered and how
- Public health programs
- State budget, including waiver slots
- Use of Federal funds allotted to the state, including closing the health care coverage gap
- School funding and educational implementation
- Insurance laws for companies operating only in NC

#### Laws NOT made by the NCGA (Laws that only affect people in their local community or that affect all Americans)

- Local or neighborhood ordinances
- National health-care reform
- National Medicaid and Medicare guidelines
- Insurance coverage for nationwide companies, self-insured companies, federal employees or the military



# STATE Government

## The State Constitution

3 Branches of Government:

- Legislative
- Executive
- Judicial

### Executive (carries out laws)

Governor	Lieutenant Governor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforce the laws made by the legislature</li> <li>• Serve four-year terms with a two-term limit</li> <li>• Both work in Raleigh</li> </ul>	

## Department of Health and Human Services

### Division of Health Benefits

- Administrative body that manages NC Medicaid and NC Health Choice for millions of people in NC.
- Develops the State Plan for Medicaid services, Medicaid waivers like Innovations, and other Medicaid policy, rules, and regulations. Sometimes those rules and regulations are the result of Federal policy or laws created by the NC General Assembly.
- Oversees Medicaid Managed Care and contracts with MCOs.
- Manages the information system used to track provider payments, NC TRACKS.
- Not responsible for eligibility determination for Medicaid, which is done by each county's Department of Social Services.

### Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse

- Administrative body of DHHS that oversees mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse services.
- Oversees policy for MH/DD/SAS and local management entities for MHDDSA managed care.
- Organized by function, not disability area.
- Creates some of the rules and regulations to run the MHDDSA system. (Sometimes these rules and regulations are a result of laws created by the General Assembly.)
- Not responsible for Medicaid; works with the Department of Medical Assistance on Medicaid MH/DD/SA policy.

## How a Bill Becomes a Law:

1. Bills introduced ("first reading") in either the House or Senate Chamber
2. Assigned to committee
  - It may stay here and never be heard
3. Heard in committee
  - Debated; Amended; Reported out (Yes or No)
  - Might go to subcommittee (committee process repeats till sent to chamber floor); or to the chamber floor
4. Second reading on chamber floor,
  - Debated; Amended; Voted

If <b>yes</b> vote, then it goes to the Third Reading	If <b>no</b> vote, then goes to another committee or fails
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5. Third reading (Vote)
 

If yes, then goes to the second chamber. In the second chamber, the whole process will repeat, including committee work	If no, then goes to another committee or fails
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If yes, in second chamber – then to governor for signing

### State Legislative Committees

❖ Our part-time legislators need to be “experts” in many different topics. This is impossible, and so committees on specific topics are formed to review new bills as they are introduced and to study areas of concern or interest.

❖ There are three types of committees:

#### 1. Standing committees

- Permanent committees that meet when the legislature is in session
- Review the new bills as they are introduced
- The House and Senate each have their own committees for reviewing bills introduced during session

#### 2. Interim committees

- Temporary committees that meet when the legislature is not in session
- Often they are study committees that study specific topics
- Prepare bill recommendations for the next legislative session
- The House and Senate have their own committees, but there can also be joint committees

#### 3. Joint committees

- Committees where members from both the House and the Senate work together

❖ Legislative committee meetings are open to the public.

- Lists of all the committees: House standing, Senate Standing, Interim and Joint: [www.ncleg.net/gascripts/Committees/Committees.asp](http://www.ncleg.net/gascripts/Committees/Committees.asp)
- The General Assembly website hosts a legislative calendar of committee meetings with dates, times and locations of meetings (most in Raleigh): [www.ncleg.net/LegislativeCalendar/](http://www.ncleg.net/LegislativeCalendar/)
- Committees may have audio or video fees that allow the public to watch or listen.

## LOCAL Government

Local governments are all run very differently; to learn about your locally elected officials and government go to your local government websites. Local government is divided into five categories:

### 1. County (With regards to MHDDSA, counties)

- Provide services via the LME-MCO
- Appoint County Commissioners to LME-MCO Board
- Board appoints members based on law, and own rules, LME-MCO director answers to board and to state of NC via contract
- May appropriate funds, maintenance of effort required for recurring funds

### 2. Special Districts (Managed Care Organizations, which):

- Manage MH/DD/SAS services including Medicaid
- Develop plan for local services
- Provider endorsement, monitoring, technical assistance, capacity development and quality control
- Authorize state funded services (single stream funding/IPRS)
- May authorize state hospital usage
- Provide screening, triage and referral (STR)
- Care coordination
- Community collaboration
- Fiscal management of state and local funds

### 3. Town and Township

### 4. Municipality

### 5. School District

# About Autism

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to a group of developmental disabilities – including classic autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger’s Syndrome – that affect a person’s ability to understand what they see, hear, and otherwise sense. It is a brain disorder that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior.

Individuals with ASD typically have difficulty understanding verbal and nonverbal communication and learning appropriate ways of relating to other people, objects, and events. No two people with ASD are the same. As its name implies, ASD is a spectrum disorder that affects individuals differently and with varying degrees of severity. Additionally, ASD is often found in combination with other disabilities.

**It is estimated that up to 1 out of every 54 children has some form of ASD.**

The overall incidence of ASD is consistent around the globe, but it is five times more prevalent in boys than in girls. ASD knows no racial, ethnic, or social boundaries, and family income, lifestyle, and educational levels do not affect the chance of occurrence. While ASD is typically diagnosed in children, it is a lifelong disorder that affects individuals of all ages.

## What Causes ASD?

Although it was first identified in 1943, to this day no one knows exactly what causes ASD. However, research to discover its cause is ongoing. Many researchers believe that there is a strong genetic component. Some research suggests a physical problem that affects the parts of the brain that process language and information; other research points to an imbalance of brain chemicals. A variety of possible external or environmental triggers are also being studied. It is possible that ASD is caused by a combination of several factors. ASD also is often found in combination with other disabilities.

## Signs and Symptoms

People with ASD may have problems with social, behavioral, and communication skills. They might repeat behaviors and might not understand change in their daily activities. Many people with ASD also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things.

### A person with ASD might:

- have severe language deficits or differences
- talk about or show interest in a restricted range of topics
- not point at objects to show interest, such as an airplane flying over
- not look at objects when another person points at them
- have trouble relating to others or not have an interest in other people at all
- avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- have trouble understanding other people’s feelings or talking about their own feelings
- prefer not to be held or cuddled or might cuddle only when they want to
- appear to be unaware when other people talk to them but respond to other sounds
- repeat or echo words or phrases said to them, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language (echolalia)
- have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions
- laugh, cry, or show distress for no apparent reason
- repeat actions over and over again
- have trouble adapting when a routine changes
- have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound
- be oversensitive or under-sensitive to pain
- lose skills they once had (for instance, stop saying words they were once using)



## Autism Society of North Carolina

The Autism Society of North Carolina improves the lives of individuals with autism, supports their families, and educates communities.

We respect and value the uniqueness of all individuals with autism; when provided the opportunity, each person can make a unique contribution to their family, community, and society. For over 50 years, we have improved the lives of individuals with autism, supported their families, and educated communities across North Carolina.

Autism Society of North Carolina  
5121 Kingdom Way, Suite 100  
Raleigh, NC 27607

800-442-2762  
info@autismsociety-nc.org  
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Connect with us on social media:  
[facebook.com/AutismSocietyofNorthCarolina](https://facebook.com/AutismSocietyofNorthCarolina)  
[twitter.com/AutismSocietyNC](https://twitter.com/AutismSocietyNC)  
[instagram.com/autismsocietync](https://instagram.com/autismsocietync)

**We improve lives:** Our services and programs are tailored to the unique needs of individuals with autism. We enable them to have healthy, safe, and fulfilling lives in their own communities. Our expertise helps individuals – many of whom have significant lifelong needs – be as independent as possible and achieve their goals and dreams.

**We support families:** Autism Resource Specialists are often the first people parents talk to after their child is diagnosed. We help families connect with resources, keep their children safe, find services, and resolve school issues. We also provide guidance on lifelong issues including employment, residential options, and planning for children's needs beyond parents' lives.

**We educate communities:** Our training for professionals such as doctors and teachers has increased the quality of care for individuals with autism. We advocate for the needs of the autism community with state policy-makers. Our education efforts have increased public awareness of autism and helped NC have a lower average age of diagnosis than the U.S.