

Creating Grassroots Advocacy Campaigns for Child Safety Issues: A Case Study

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What is grassroots advocacy?

- Individual constituents—not a lobbying group—contacting their legislators about an issue
- Encouraging people to speak up and let their voices be heard!

Why is it important?

- Legislators want to do the right thing, but they also want to please voters
- Next to voting, the most important way citizens can participate in government is to communicate their wishes to legislators
- A successful grassroots advocacy campaign can build the groundswell of support needed to sway legislators

Case study: Strengthening Ohio's CPS law

Our situation in 2006

- Worst record in the nation for protecting child passengers
- No laws governing rear seat passengers from the time they reach 4 years/40 lbs
- Previous legislative efforts all failed
- Opposition made it an individual rights issue
- Lawmakers believed the public didn't want to be told how to take care of their kids

Our goal

Work to support passage of a bill introduced in the Ohio House (would require rear-seat passengers <16 to be restrained) by:

- Refocusing the issue from individual freedom to child safety
- Getting the public engaged enough to speak out to their legislators
- Getting the media engaged so we could reach a wider audience with our advocacy message

Framing: personal rights or public health issue?

- Government shouldn't tell me how to take care of my kids

OR

- Government has a responsibility to protect children
- Parents look to the law for guidance, and weak laws fail children and families

Keeping potential allies from becoming opponents

- Handling the concerns of advocates who believed the proposed revision didn't go far enough
- Positioning the bill as a first step in a long-term effort

Engaging the public

- Find out what they already know and believe
- Give them the information they need to see it your way
- Inspire them to want to act
- Give them everything they need to make it easy and painless to act

What do people know—or think they know—about the issue?

- Survey of ~200 visitors to the Cleveland Auto Show
- 3 in 4 people believed the law already mandated restraint use for all children
- Only 1 person who believed we already had a law thought it was too strong—many believed it was not strong enough

What do people need to know?

Advocacy packet with info on:

- how to be an advocate
- facts about the law
- answers to frequently asked questions

How to be an advocate

1) Get informed—understand the issue so you can feel comfortable discussing it.

2) Communicate—write or call to let your legislator know what you think.

Tips for writing an effective letter or e-mail

Facts about the law and the issues

Fact sheet

- **Ohio currently has the weakest child passenger safety law in the United States. Children who have not yet reached the age of 4 and 40 pounds in weight are required to be restrained in an appropriate child restraint. Once a child has reached the age of 4 and is over 40 pounds in weight, however, there are no regulations governing child passengers in the rear seat of a vehicle.**
- **Current regulations say that a 39 pound 4-year-old must be restrained in a child safety seat, but a 41 pound 4-year-old does not even require a seat belt. In fact, in Ohio a child who has outgrown the limitations of the state's child passenger safety statute could ride standing in the rear seat and not be in violation of the law.**
- **By failing to provide guidelines to parents and caregivers traveling with children over the age of 4, Ohio falls far short of its obligation to protect its youngest citizens as motor vehicle occupants.**
- **In Ohio, as in the U.S. as a whole, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children over the age of 1.**

Answers to frequently asked questions

- What is the difference between a primary and secondary law?
- How do seat belts and car seats work to prevent injury?
- What is seat belt syndrome?
- I've heard people say that seat belts can actually be dangerous for children. Is mandating restraint use for child passengers really in the best interests of Ohio's kids?
- What about differential enforcement?

Making it easy for people to be advocates

Postcard series

This year don't wrap dad's Father's Day present in a bow and ribbon...

**Wrap it
in a belt.**

**Please help make restraint use mandatory
for all passengers under the age of 16.**



Last year, 38 Ohio children died in motor vehicle crashes while riding unrestrained.

Parents look to the law for guidance: don't let the law fall any more fathers.

Celebrate this Father's Day by working with your fellow legislators to extend Ohio's child restraint law to all children under age 16.

39¢
POSTAGE

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____



Keeping costs down



In Ohio, police officers can stop and ticket a motorist for tossing trash out the window, but cannot do anything when they see young passengers riding unrestrained, as long as those children are over the age of 4. Isn't protecting children as important as keeping roads clean?

What to include with postcards?

- giving people information in an easy-to-use format
- everything you need at your fingertips
- treading the fine line between just enough and too much

Three formats

- advocacy packet
- press packet
- mini-advocacy packet

Engaging the media: Coming up with a plan and writing a great press release

Press releases

- A paper or TV station may receive hundreds of press releases each day
- Most press releases end up in the garbage
- Reporters don't care about your program, press conference, or project, UNLESS you give them something that makes their jobs easier—a good story

Planning/Writing: Think like a reporter

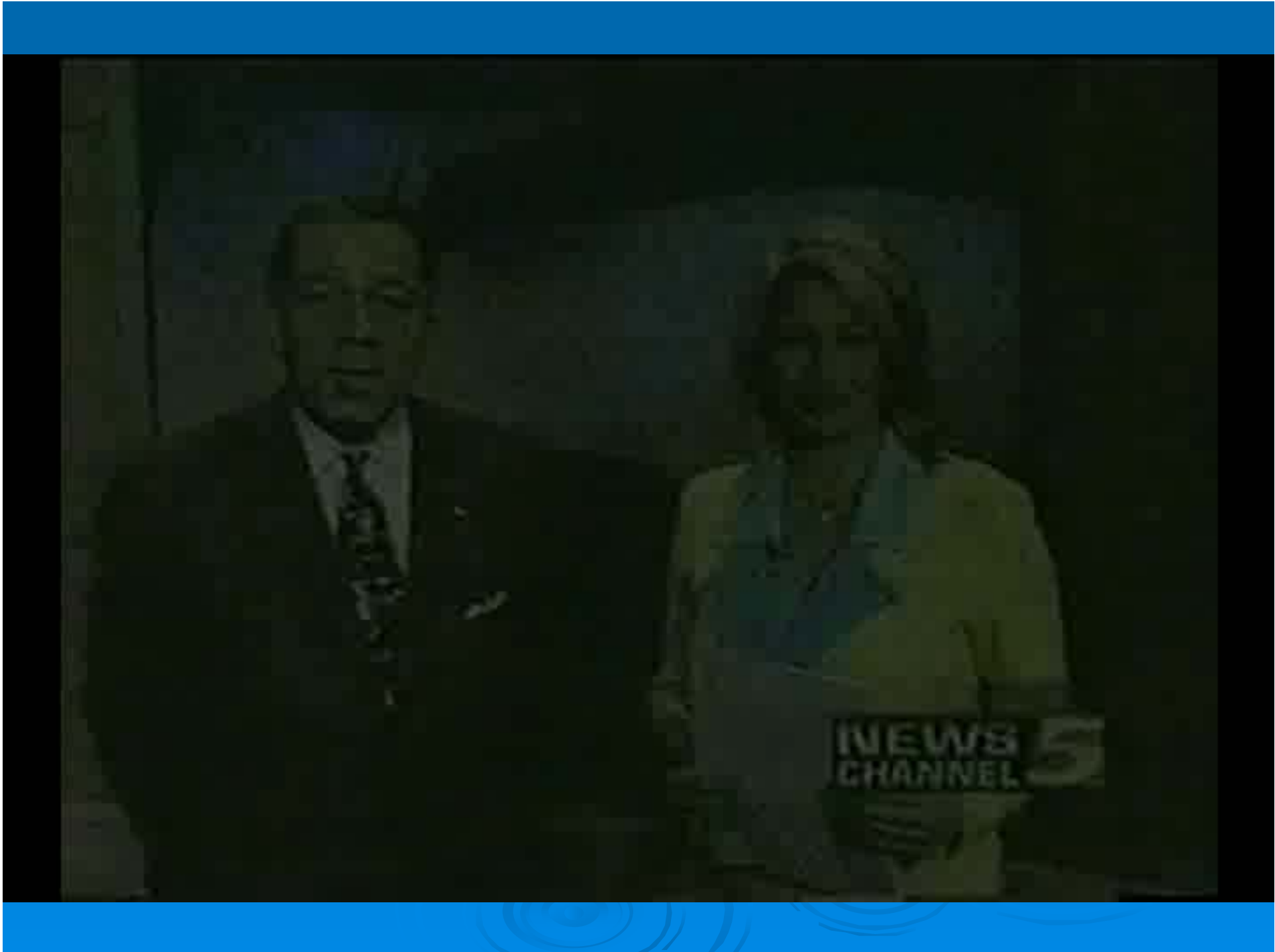
- Step out of your role as injury prevention specialist or public health professional and look at the subject like a reporter looking for an interesting story
- Develop story angles from a reporter's perspective
- Keep out hype and hyperbole

CPS week press conference

- Kicked off campaign
- Sold the story to the media with a solid plan that captured the imagination and made it easy for reporters
- Incorporated highly visual demonstration
- Effectively managed the 'spin' on the story coverage

Media as a tool for advocacy

- Single event gained almost 9 minutes of earned media
- Story picked up by every major media outlet in Cleveland
- All pieces followed the storyline we'd provided and stayed remarkably on point
- Call for advocacy went out to the 1.4 million people of Greater Cleveland



Using the momentum

- day care centers
- schools
- PTAs
- health fairs
- community partners
 - ✓ Safe Kids Greater Cleveland (more than 300 members)
 - ✓ Cuyahoga County Speed, Reckless, and Aggressive Driving Coalition (law enforcement representatives from 45 communities)

Keeping the pressure on

- follow up with partners
- reminders
- getting new partners involved

Outcome

- 16,000 postcards distributed in our area over a six-month period
- 10,000 postcards ordered for other Safe Kids Coalitions around the state
- Signed into law in January, 2007 (as add-on to a teen driver bill)
- Went into effect April 1, 2007

Take-home message

- Grassroots advocacy works
- Average citizens v. professional lobbyists
- Start by finding out what people already know or believe about the issue
- Get the public involved by giving them the tools they need to make it easy and painless to take action
- Get the media involved by handing them a pre-packaged story they can run with
- Keep the pressure on—don't let up!

Contact information

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