Frequently Asked Questions about Working with a Lobbyist

**What is a lobbyist?**
A lobbyist is any person or organization retained, designated, or employed by a client to lobby on the client’s behalf. Lobbyists engage in various activities to garner support for legislative or regulatory change. The act of lobbying is defined in statute in a variety of ways. The New York State Lobbying Act (1/1/2000) defines lobbying as “any attempt to influence the passage or defeat of legislation or approval or disapproval of legislation by the executive branch (governor, president) or the adoption or rejection of any rule/regulation having the force of law.” It is critical that anyone employing a lobbyist or engaging in lobbying consult their state laws and regulations to learn about the definition, requirements, and levels of lobbying.

**What does a lobbyist do?**
Lobbyists employed by state associations can provide single or comprehensive services, depending upon the contracting arrangements. Possible activities include:

- Monitoring proposed legislation.
- Monitoring regulatory changes and other state education department activities.
- Promoting the state association’s legislative agenda.
- Direct lobbying (meeting with elected officials and asking for their support/opposition of an issue, disseminating advocacy materials on behalf of the association).
- Drafting legislation and finding sponsors for the legislation.
- Facilitating contact with other key stakeholders (teachers’ union, university trainers).
- Leading a grassroots advocacy response.
- Creating templates for advocacy letters that can be sent to elected officials by association members.
- Organizing “hill” briefings on topics important to the association.
- Organizing a “hill day” where association members go to elected officials offices to promote their legislative agenda including specific issues and bills.
- Providing updates about issues through communications with association board and members.

**How do we go about hiring a lobbyist?**
Suggestions for hiring a lobbyist:

- Use contacts with other education/mental health professional organizations to obtain lobbyist recommendations (e.g., school social workers, school counselors, teachers).
• Consider “sharing” a lobbyist with another allied education/mental health professional organization with interest in monitoring and advocating similar issues (a number of smaller states have successfully arranged this).

• Contact recommended lobbyists and invite them to an interview. Ask them to provide a resume in advance of the meeting.

• Interview several candidates: Prepare interview questions that check their knowledge of school psychology, education, and other key issues; know what you want the lobbyist to do in advance of the interview; ask them to describe how they would plan to advance the issues of your association.

• Ask the potential lobbyist(s) to provide references and prepare a sample contract designating responsibilities as well as fees.

• Check references: Look for candidates who have good interpersonal skills, responsiveness to requests, knowledge of the issues, and contacts with specific legislators’ offices, committees, and other related organizations.

• Review the costs and benefits of each candidate. Consider experience, skills, contacts, and level of personal “compatibility” with board members.

• Offer a short-term contract initially and only extend it if your association is satisfied with the services provided.

What are the benefits of a lobbyist?

Lobbyists provide:

• Increased visibility and consistent exposure to state association issues in the eyes of policy makers including elected officials and state department officials (e.g., education, health, mental health).

• A familiar “contact person” for elected officials and staff who need resources, information, or to discuss legislative proposals.

• “Hot-off-the-press” information about legislative happenings enabling lobbyists to help state organizations stay informed and maintain a proactive position regarding issues impacting children, education, and families.

• Exposure, which may lead to inclusion of school psychologists’ perspectives in future legislation/policy and critical policy development activities regarding effective school safety and improving access to mental health supports for students.