

Advocacy with

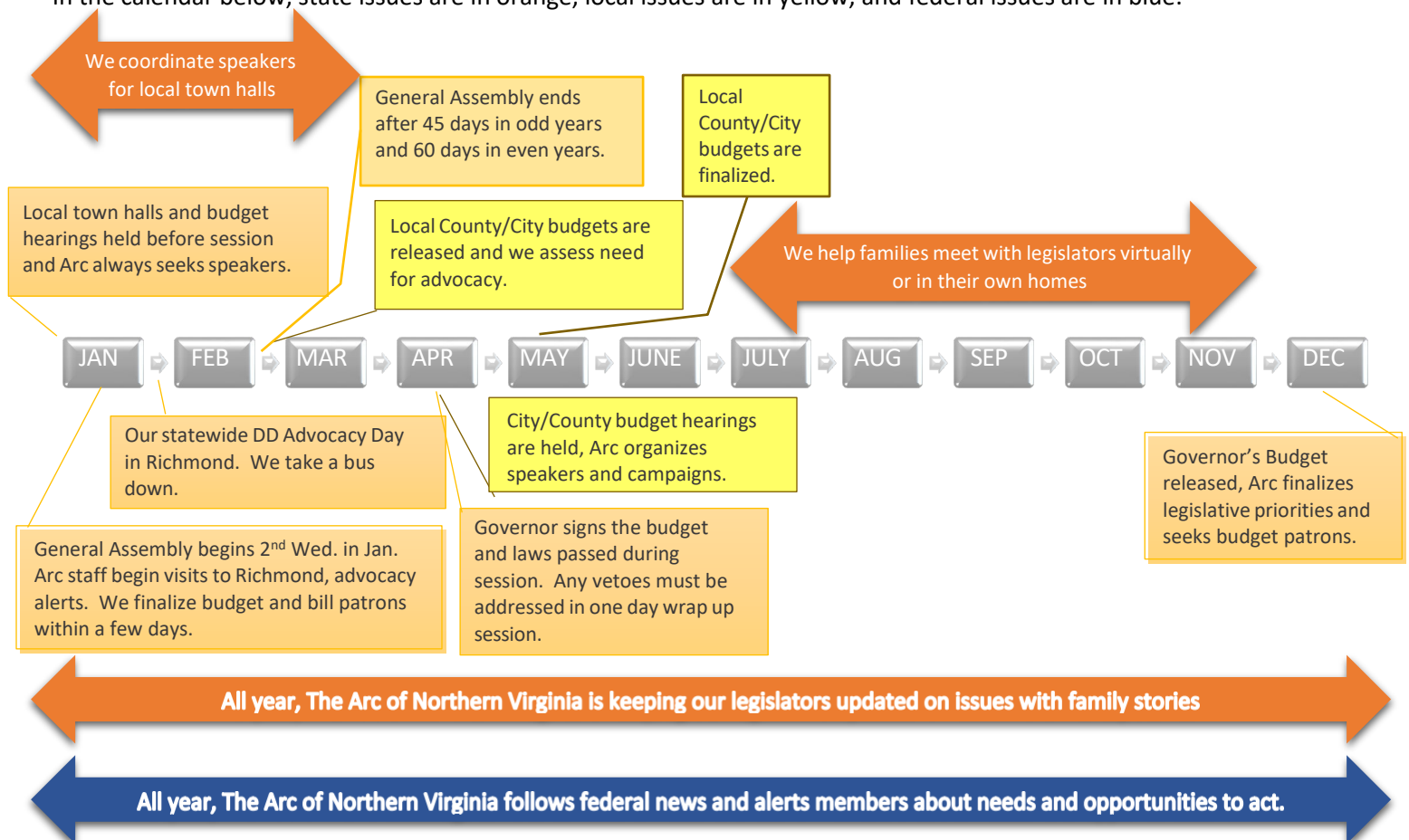


Our History

The Arc of Northern Virginia was founded in 1962 by parents who were advocating for public school options for their children with disabilities, and we've never stopped advocating since then. Our focus is grassroots advocacy, which means educating people with disabilities and their loved ones about what is going on and giving them the tools, information, and support they need to get involved and improve the lives of all people with disabilities.

A Year in Advocacy

Most of our focus is on advocating for services, supports, rights, and funding at the state and local levels. Though there are surprises and changes in timelines every year, our advocacy usually follows a similar pattern. In the calendar below, state issues are in orange, local issues are in yellow, and federal issues are in blue.



As you can see in the calendar above, the early months of the year are dominated by the state legislative session, where all of our laws and state budget are passed in just 45 or 60 days, depending on the year. During this time, we need a lot of speakers, people willing to join virtual meetings or travel to Richmond, and people able to respond to Action Alerts urging them to call or write their legislators about a range of issues. Local advocacy is generally centered on budgets, which happen in the spring time. Though we do not routinely have a presence on the Hill, we work closely with our national chapter to respond to federal issues as needed.

Advocacy Campaigns

We are always trying to come up with new ways to advocate and help people tell their stories. These are some of the things we do on an ongoing basis.

1. We have **monthly hybrid People First meetings for young self-advocates (ages 16-26) and a separate virtual group for adult self-advocates** to learn about advocacy issues and how to get involved. We **partner with Toastmaster's** during these meetings to run "A Life Like Yours" Toastmasters, an adapted chapter of the public speaking group. To learn more, visit <https://thearcofnova.org/self-advocacy/>
2. We host several **candidate forums** each year where candidates can answer questions about their work and policy plans. We need people to attend, ask questions, and spread the word about these events.
3. Between the end of General Assembly session and the end of the year, **we work with families to invite their legislators to come to their homes (or virtual living rooms) for a visit**. The family tells their story of what is working and what is not, and we share the statewide view, data, and possible solutions.
4. We send out **Action Alerts** to people on our listserv when critical votes, policies, or budget issues are coming up. We'll give you the information you need to **reply, email, or call** and help us ensure things go the right way.
5. Before General Assembly begins and during weekends of the session, **we attend town halls** all over Northern Virginia (sometimes virtual) to hear updates and give feedback. We always need people to **join us in solidarity and speak at these events**.
6. We follow local budgets and speak at local budget hearings and other information sessions. We always need people to **join us in solidarity and speak at these events**.
7. Each year during General Assembly, we take **a bus to Richmond for Developmental Disabilities Advocacy Day**. We always need people to join us on the bus, speak to legislators in Richmond, attend rallies, and come back that day. We also engage in virtual meetings for people who cannot make the bus trip, or want to do more.
8. We **track bills during session**. We follow bills and budget amendments that affect the DD community. If you'd like to help us follow these bills and/or testify about issues of concern, we would love to have you.
9. We partner with legislators. If you'd like to be a **"go to" contact for your local legislator** to keep them updated on how the disability community is doing and what we need, let us know.

We Need You Advocating with Us

If you'd like to join us in advocacy, please email Lucy Beadnell at lucy.beadnell@thearcofnova.org. Tell Lucy what interests you, a little about the person with a disability in your life, and what you'd like to do. Lucy will add you to our "Advocacy Listserv" and help you prepare for anything else you'd like to do.

When you think about what you'd like to do, check out the calendar on page one to see what works with your schedule. Look at the list of our advocacy campaigns to see if anything really appeals to you. We welcome new ideas and proposals, too!

Other Opportunities to Advocate

We suggest that anyone interested in advocacy get on the listservs for our chapter of The Arc, our state chapter The Arc of Virginia, and our national organization The Arc. That way you'll get all of the critical updates on local, state, and federal issues. All of our chapters cover the same population, but we all advocate in different places and have different opportunities to get involved. We love for families to be a part of the full Arc network and you'll always have opportunities to advocate!

- To join the main listserv for The Arc of Northern Virginia, visit: <https://thearcofnova.org/about-us/newsroom/>
- To join the listserv for The Arc of Virginia, visit: <https://www.thearcofva.org/stay-informed>
- To join the advocacy listserv for The Arc, visit: <https://thearc.org/policy-advocacy/grassroots/>