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## **PUBLIC POLICY**

We live in the United States of America. Most of us refer to the U.S., when talking about government, that we are a democracy. We are not. We are a Republic. Here's the difference:

- ✓ In democracy, the people meet and exercise the government in person. In a republic, they assemble and administer it by their representative and agents.
- ✓ In a republic, the government is delegated to a small number of citizens elected by the rest. In a democracy, laws are made directly by the voting majority.
- ✓ In a pure democracy, the rights of the minority are largely unprotected. In a republic, laws are made by representatives chosen by the people and must comply with a constitution that specifically protects the rights of the minority from the will of the majority.

### **DEFINITION of PUBLIC POLICY**

We often talk about public policy, but do we know what exactly it is? There are often misconceptions about what public policy is and what it entails. The definition of public policy is:



“An institutionalized proposal or a decided set of elements like laws, regulations, guidelines, and actions to solve or address relevant and real-world problems.”

- As a noun: the principles, often unwritten, on which social laws are based
- Law: the principle that injury to the public good is a basis for denying the legality of a contract or other transaction
- Policy: Policy is made in response to some sort of issue or problem that requires attention
- Policy: Policy is what the government chooses to do (actual) or not to do (implied) about a particular issue or problem

Members of FCE are part of the citizenry of the United States. As good citizens, we should be involved in how our representatives, whether elected or appointed, make their decisions. All too often we think we will not be heard, or that we don't know enough, or we are intimidated by the whole process.

The process of effective public policy can be a bit daunting. However, we are all capable of joining in to make a difference in what we believe.

### **PUBLIC POLICY vs PRIVATE**

One question that is often asked when talking about public policy is how does something that happens in private become the “business” of the public? Good question.

A private problem becomes a social or public issue when it no longer affects just the individual and those immediately around that individual, it is when it begins to have an effect on the wider public or society as a whole.

*Can anyone give an example?*

## UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC POLICY

Public Policy is an institutionalized proposal or a decided set of elements like laws, regulations, guidelines, and actions to solve or address relevant and real-world problems, guided by a conception.

There are 5 characteristics of public policy:

1. Policy consists of courses of action rather than mere decisions
2. Policy is goal-oriented action
3. Policy is what government does, not what it says it will do or intends to do
4. Policy is based upon law and is authoritative
5. Policy is the result of political process

<sup>1</sup> To be engaged citizens, knowledgeable citizens, and have a significant impact on issues that affect us:

1. Critical thinking: recognize and disregard arguments founded on attacks, appeals to authority, or other fallacies
2. Communication skills: learn to solve problems with multiple potential solutions, communicate why you prefer one or two over the others using facts and include how to address any down-sides or negativity
3. Long-Term thinking: not all changes are felt on immediately, it can take years for it to be felt the way it was intended
4. Ability to work with diverse groups of people: discuss ideas with people outside your circle, how do they feel, how will changes impact them, can you work together (don't get bogged down in the differences)
5. Willingness to compromise: we can't always have our own way, for changes to be made for all, we need to compromise and work for the best for all

Public Policy addresses: Social, Moral and Economic values. These tie a society into a cohesive, working system and will change over time

## LIFE CYCLE of an ISSUE

There is a life cycle to all issues:

- Concerns—an awareness that things are not as we want
- Issues Identification—surveys, studies, public forums, resource consultants, reading
- Conflict—not everyone will agree that the issue is really an issue or they will have a completely different idea on how to resolve it
- Rank Priorities—is there a group consensus, is there danger of delay, are financial and time resources available to address the issue
- Analyze the Issue—who is involved, what is their interest, what is the status of the issue
- Consider Alternative Solutions and Consequences: list advantages and disadvantages of each alternative solution, analyze each alternative, conduct hearings, identify any limiting factors and how they might be overcome
- Make a Choice—determine your position and rationale
- Develop a Plan of Action—what changes should take place, what strategies to use, who can help, who will oppose you, what resources do you have, determine tasks that need to be done and make assignments, set deadlines, follow-up
- Implement the Plan—will your group act individually or as a group, communicate your position to decision makers, encourage other groups to support your position, communicate your position to media, keep everyone informed on current status of issue
- Evaluate your efforts

## HOW TO BECOME INVOLVED

How do we become involved in public policy issues, decisions, or changes?

1. Educate yourself and others about a common issue or problem
2. Find out who local, state, and national representatives are
3. Communicate with those officials

4



Public Policy  
2024



National Association for  
Family & Community Education

4. Participate, attend meetings
5. Work to identify others who would be willing to support a common goal
6. Be informed about what you will be asked to vote on, ask questions
7. Do not give up, it might take some time

At the 2023 National FCE Conference, members in attendance went through a long process to decide what we should focus on as a minimum three-year project. The decision was “Food Security” and that will help support the FCE proposed and passed resolution at the ACWW Triennial in Malaysia concerning “Food Waste”.

What can we do? Can we affect public policy about Food Security and/or Food Waste? How?

### ***SHARE IDEAS for what FCE can specifically do—Activity***

#### **WHAT to do as an INDIVIDUAL**

Oft times we are overwhelmed at the idea of having any influence on policy decisions. There are just eight easy things we can do:

1. Stay informed
  - Knowledge is power. Keep yourself updated on local, national and global issues. Read reliable news sources, research studies and policy papers.
  - Understand the nuances of different policies, their implications, and the context in which they operate.
2. Engage with local government
  - Attend town hall meetings, city or county council sessions and community events.
  - Voice your opinions, ask questions and participate in discussions. Your input matters!
3. Join advocacy groups
  - Find organizations that match your interests.
  - Volunteer with these groups, attend rallies, and collaborate

4. Write letters and petitions
  - Express your views through letters to elected officials, government agencies and newspapers.
  - Sign and share online petitions related to the cause.
5. Network and collaborate
  - Connect with policymakers, researchers, and activists.
  - Attend conferences, workshops and seminars.
  - Collaborate on research projects or policy proposals.
  - Your unique perspective matters!
6. Run for office
  - If you're passionate about making a difference, consider running for an office, whether it be City/County Council, School Board, State Legislature, all are excellent starting points
  - Campaign, engage with voters, and articulate your vision for change.
7. Educate others
  - Host workshops, webinars, or community sessions on policy topics. Empower others with knowledge.
  - Encourage critical thinking and informed decision-making.
8. Leverage social media
  - Use platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn to share information, raise awareness and connect with policymakers.
  - Engage in respectful dialogue and amplify important messages.

Every voice matters. By actively participating in the process, you contribute to shaping policies that impact us all.

## REACHING OUT

Each state should investigate what Food Waste and Food Security looks like in their state. What's thrown away? Is there a law in place to give leftover foods from restaurants to homeless shelters? What laws are in place locally- and state-level about protecting our food sources? Is there a plan in place should there be long-term flooding or drought? What about another natural disaster?

Do we, as individuals, know what we should do to ensure our personal food security? What about food waste? Can we do better about not throwing foods away?

All information gathered can be compiled and put into one document so that all members can contact their Representatives and Senators. State information can be used by that State's members to contact state and local legislators.

As you are gathering information, find out if there are other organizations that would be willing to work with you at the local or state level or a bigger step to working with our National organization. Keep National FCE informed of what you are doing. Keep track of number of people involved, hours spent, what was done, etc. If you need help, reach out to Board members.

All FCE Hearth Fires and FCL materials are available on the National FCE website.

Information on contacting FCE Board members or other states' officers is also on the website.

## CONCLUSION

National FCE has been involved many times in changing public policy on the national level. Look at our history: school food programs, mobile libraries, public health services, and immunization programs are just a few that come to mind.

We had the effect of really changing the world around us. We've done it before and we can do it again.

Gather the information that's needed. We can go through the process of determining how and what we will communicate, who will we work with, our agenda for getting this done, etc.

First things first, gather the information.

We CAN and WILL do this! We all, no matter where on earth we live, need FOOD SECURITY.



Judy Fullmer, National FCE President  
with newly designed & presented logo and banner  
November, 2023



## **RESOURCES**

<sup>1</sup> “6 Strategies for Teaching Public Policy”, Day, Erik, Getting Smart project manager

Kansas FCE website on Public Policy

“Someone’s in the USA asking...Can I be a lobbyist?”, National FCE Hearth Fire Series, Number 28

“Come Ride with Us for an Adventure in Public Policy”, National FCE’s Family Community Leadership resource

“Never Underestimate the Power of One”, National FCE’s Family Community Leadership resource

National FCE website: [nafce.org](http://nafce.org)

