

# ICF SELF-REGULATION AND ADVOCACY HANDBOOK

## United States of America

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## Introduction

Since the creation of the International Coach Federation in 1995, ICF leadership, Members and staff have been active proponents of self-regulation of professional coaching. ICF's rigorous standards and credentialing and accreditation programs represent expertise and discipline in an industry that is frequently targeted for piecemeal regulation or wholly misunderstood by legislators and regulators unfamiliar with the profession.

The goals of this handbook are to:

- Communicate basic, broadly held tenets regarding the regulation and monitoring of coaches, as espoused by ICF and its membership
- Look at the regulatory process and how ICF Members can help shape the landscape of industry regulation to promote and maintain industry quality
- Look at recent, real-world examples of instances where laws and regulations could have had a significant impact on ICF Members and their clients
- Show how you can become a resource to regulatory officials who are unfamiliar with coaching and how you can work with them to create the best regulatory landscape for both members and clients

## Why Self-regulation?

According to the National Conference of State Legislators, there are 7,383 state legislators in the United States. Add to this 535 members of Congress, local city council members, and state and local regulatory staff and the number of stakeholders in the governing and regulatory process grows exponentially.

These people are faced with being subject-matter experts on many topics in a given day. Constituents often bring up topics for action about which the official has little to no knowledge.

That's why associations like ICF are so important. ICF, with strict standards and self-regulatory guidelines in place, is a tremendous source of instant expertise and guidance to officials that may only think of the type of coaches that wear whistles around their necks. In the *2016 ICF Global Coaching Study*, 52 percent of coach practitioners said they believed that coaching should be regulated. Among those respondents (including both coaches and managers/leaders using coaching skills) not ruling out the prospect of regulation, 84% said that professional coaching associations were best positioned to regulate the industry.

Over the past 20 years, ICF has grown into a global organization, with a membership of more than 27,000 professional, personal and business coaches in 135-plus countries. Globally, more than 23,000 coaches hold an ICF Credential. ICF also has more than 130 chapters in more than 70 countries.

ICF is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high standards, providing independent certification and building a worldwide network of accredited coach training programs. States, cities and other governmental units looking at a successful self-regulatory model should look to ICF rather than creating a hodgepodge of regulatory frameworks that may differ from state to state.

For any questions or concerns you may have about ICF regulatory issues, please contact ICF Assistant Executive Director Todd Hamilton either by email ([todd.hamilton@coachfederation.org](mailto:todd.hamilton@coachfederation.org)) or by phone (+1.859.226.4205).

## Section 1: Why advocacy is important to ICF

ICF believes there is a solid, compelling case to be made for self-regulation of ICF Members and ICF-credentialed coaches.

ICF's foundations for self-regulation of coaching are based on:

- ▶ Core Competencies that define a professional coach's required skills and establish the foundation for the professional credentialing examination and accreditation for coach-training programs
- ▶ A strictly enforced Code of Ethics to which coaches pledge commitment and accountability to standards of professional conduct
- ▶ Professional oversight through an Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) process, which allows the public to report concerns and to be confident of objective investigation, follow-up and disciplinary action (including termination of ICF Membership or Credential) by an Independent Review Board (IRB)
- ▶ Professional coach credentialing, entailing a stringent examination and review process in which coaches must demonstrate their skills, proficiency and documented experience in application of the ICF Core Competencies
- ▶ Continuing education requirements for periodic renewal of coaching credentials to ensure continued professional growth and development
- ▶ Professional coach training accreditation, in which coach-training programs submit to review and continuing oversight to demonstrate their commitment to the highest standards for curricula and alignment with defined core competencies, faculty, structure, proficiency and ethics to support excellence in coach training
- ▶ Ongoing self-regulatory oversight initiatives to track the needs and concerns of individual and organizational clients on an international basis and to demonstrate an active commitment to meaningful, professional self-governance

In a 2011 article on the professionalization of coaching, David Gray of the United Kingdom's University of Surrey notes that "professional work is defined and redefined through the continuous struggle between different occupational groups. If successful, society (the State) grants professional groups a degree of autonomy in exchange for self-regulation—a promise that the profession will set up and enforce standards of professional development and ethical practice."

Gray adds that groups like ICF can offer a solid alternative to a completely new, state-created regulatory apparatus:







It appears ... the existence of an association like the ICF, with its code of ethics, has given some surety to state legislators that self-regulation is taking place ... and that state regulation is unnecessary. However, the fact that several US states have considered the regulation of coaching suggests that continuing self-regulation is not guaranteed.

Indeed, several states have introduced legislation to regulate coaching, requiring mobilization of ICF staff and leadership resources. But in all instances, the most important component of ICF's regulatory action is you, the member and practitioner.

ICF has staff members who monitor and respond quickly to legislative and regulatory issues. But, as famed U.S. politician Thomas "Tip" O'Neill noted, all politics is local.

Letters from Lexington, Kentucky, to elected officials in Juneau, Montpelier or Pierre are necessary and important, but they don't carry the impact of a detailed, reasoned letter from a constituent. ICF, as an organization, cannot vote. Staff of ICF don't vote in state and local elections where members are located. In short, ICF speaks authoritatively, but doesn't have the impact of someone, in a local district, who lives, works, pays taxes and votes in that area. **You** matter to your elected officials, not a big, faceless organization. To help yourself, your profession and your colleagues, you need to be an advocate for ICF and the coaching profession.

### Examples of ICF Self-regulation

2015	2016
 7 cases were deliberated upon by the Independent Review Board.	 6 cases were deliberated upon by the Independent Review Board.
 Coaches were required to seek additional education, with credentials and membership also revoked.	 Coaches were referred for remedial training.
 More than <b>400</b> trademark and logo issues were addressed.	 Nearly <b>150</b> trademark and logo issues were addressed.

## Section 2: Basic ICF positions/talking points on important issues

According to the best estimates available, nearly half of all coaches worldwide are members of ICF. This depth of membership allows ICF to be recognized as the global authority on the profession. As such, it is ICF's responsibility to ensure that professional coach practitioners have the best regulatory atmosphere available in which to practice their craft. There are some basic tenets that have emerged through ICF's advocacy efforts that have become building blocks of current and future advocacy efforts:

- ▶ Recognition of coaching as a distinct profession  
ICF Members have presented testimony on this issue, most notably in the District of Columbia. The main points of the testimony are:
  - Coaching is not psychology
  - Coaching is not backward-looking, but instead is rooted firmly in the present
  - Coaching is **not** about pathology, or exploring past issues impacting current behaviors
  - Coaching is about self-discovery, habits and the present tense

- A psychologist can be a coach, but a coach does not have to be a psychologist

Another fundamental tenet of ICF advocacy is that industry self-regulation is more effective, efficient and stringent than a patchwork of different state and local regulations. Points ICF has made on this issue include:

- Self-regulation is preferred to piecemeal and uninformed regulation by individual states
- Very few state legislators have experience with coaching, and less than a handful of coaches are legislators or have legislative experience
- When tasked with discussing coaching and the regulation of coaches, legislators will be reliant on external stakeholders
- As the saying goes, the squeaky wheel gets the grease ... and those that are persistent in communicating their views set the tone for the regulatory discussion
- ICF has a stringent, comprehensive system in place that exceeds the capacity and expertise of what states can create on their own
- A system of individual regulatory systems will be confusing and duplicative and create a dual compliance system for ICF Members

Other important points that ICF makes in communications with lawmakers include:

- Coaching supports personal and professional growth based on self-initiated change in pursuit of specific, actionable outcomes
- Coaching is distinct from psychology and requires highly specific education. ICF coaches have completed at least 60 hours of coaching education, with many exceeding 200 hours of education
- ICF has taken measures to ensure that the public can rely on professional coaches
- Coaching is taught separately from psychology at institutions such as Georgetown University, Columbia University, New York University and the University of Wisconsin, among many others. The academic community recognizes the difference

### Section 3: Why ICF members should be involved in the advocacy process

Among many ICF Members, advocacy has a negative connotation. Advocacy, and any activity that has political connotations, can be viewed as:

- ▶ **A waste of time.** Legislators have their minds made up, have studied the issue, and I, as one person, have little impact on the process—so why try?
- ▶ **Intellectually and morally dishonest.** Influencing legislators will require me to bend or twist facts to convince someone, who probably has no knowledge of coaching, that my position is the correct one.
- ▶ **Not in my self-interest.** So, what if there are new regulations? I'll just comply with everyone else.

The best advocacy is rooted in fact-based, supportable arguments. With its extensive research capacity, ICF Headquarters can provide statistics and information for use in advocacy efforts.

Presenting exaggerated or unsupported arguments will undermine your efforts and severely damage your ability to work effectively with your elected officials moving forward.

Research has consistently shown that citizen advocacy is effective. For example:

- ▶ Researchers Daniel Bergan and Richard Cole conducted an experiment involving Michigan state legislators contacted at random about a specific bill. They found that being contacted by constituents increases the probability of supporting the relevant legislation by about 12 percentage points.

When you engage in advocacy you become recognized as:

- ▶ **A resource.** A travel industry association conducted an annual visit to Congress to educate them on issues important to the industry. Over time, relationships formed with elected officials and, more importantly, their staffs. A legislator's staff is the gatekeeper and relationship manager, and the tracker of meetings and topics. A member, who participated in the annual visits, called the association headquarters saying that staff from their senator's office called them and asked them for their views on legislation pending in Congress. The member was astonished to be contacted, but the staff knew that they were a constituent with knowledge of the industry, and they trusted their viewpoint.
- ▶ **A leader of your profession.** Speaking strongly and authoritatively about your profession positions you as an expert among your peers and potential clients. Advocacy, and the attention it brings, can have benefits that transcend the issue.
- ▶ **A subject-matter expert.** Being known as an authority on coaching and the self-regulation of the profession opens opportunities in industry education, consulting, and thought leadership.
- ▶ **An agent to preserve the integrity of the coaching profession.** ICF's self-regulation system is comprehensive and strictly enforced. Coaches (those with the most expertise about the profession) are actively policing the profession and staying abreast of global trends. Piecemeal state regulations may result in the overall decline in industry quality and lead to a loss of public confidence in the coaching profession.

In 2007, the ICF Global Board of Directors approved the creation of the ICF Regulatory Liaison Network. Each ICF Chapter is encouraged to appoint a member as its Regulatory Liaison, serving as a point of contact and local eyes and ears for ICF on potential regulatory matters.

ICF Chapters have been encouraged to canvass their leaders and their members to identify those with an interest in, or knowledge of, regulatory matters. While it is beneficial to have the liaison be a leader in the local chapter, it's more important that they have knowledge and interest in regulatory matters as well as access to local, potential regulators.

As of 2018 the ICF Regulatory Liaison Network consists of nearly 70 members. The group has scheduled quarterly conference calls to share experiences and assist one another in addressing regulatory concerns.

Members of the Regulatory Liaison Network are encouraged to take a proactive stance by contacting their local legislators and potential regulators to raise their awareness of coaching as a profession and to explain the actions ICF has taken to ensure that high-quality services are provided.

For example, while there is no current effort to regulate coaching in Maryland, an ICF Member who lives in the state wrote to his state senator and state delegate. His communication made

them aware of what ICF does to maintain high professional standards. He also enlisted their help in monitoring and informing him of any future legislation that might impact the coaching profession. He found that representatives in the legislature were very responsive to his concerns and offered to be of help to him and ICF. He is a resource, a respected authority and a subject-matter expert for his local representatives and stands to have influence on issues that arise there.

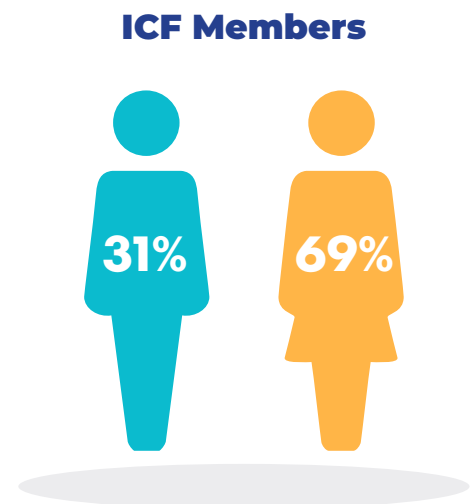
ICF urges each Chapter that has not yet appointed a Regulatory Liaison to do so as soon as possible and notify ICF Headquarters of the appointment. The new liaison will be invited to the quarterly calls and receive other pertinent information and materials.

Should any ICF Member become aware of legislative action or potential action pertaining to the regulation of the profession, they should contact their Chapter Leaders and ICF Headquarters. ICF Headquarters staff and the ICF Chapter will then coordinate their efforts to address the matter appropriately.

### ICF Member Profile Information - Tell Your Elected Officials About Your Industry

Age	ICF Members
34 years and younger	4%
35-39 years of age	9%
40-44 years of age	14%
45-49 years of age	18%
50-54 years of age	19%
55-59 years of age	16%
60-64 years of age	11%
65 years and older	7%

Highest Education Level Obtained	ICF Members
Primary level (i.e., completed education before university)	6%
Secondary level (i.e., hold a bachelor's degree)	29%
Third level (i.e., hold a more advanced degree such as a master's or a doctoral degree)	64%



Types of Clients Coached	ICF Members
High-potentials	76%
New hires	25%
Teams/workgroups	55%
Groups	28%
<b>Government</b>	<b>17%</b>
Nonprofit	26%
Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)	12%
I do not coach any of these types of clients	10%

### Profile Information, State Legislators and Comparison with ICF Membership

Source: The National Conference of State Legislators

- ▶ The average age of all state legislators is 56, compared with 47 for the adult U.S. population. The median age of the average ICF Member is 50-55.
- ▶ Women comprise 25 percent of state legislators. ICF's membership is nearly 70 percent female.
- ▶ 40 percent of state legislators have advanced degrees. Sixty-four percent of ICF Members have advanced degrees.
- ▶ ICF's overwhelmingly female membership is an important demographic point for legislators. Legislators do not like to create regulatory burdens for small business, particularly women- or minority-owned businesses.

## Section 4: How a bill becomes a law

The way a bill becomes law is consistent in all but one state. Nebraska, with its unicameral (one legislative body) legislature, is the outlier.

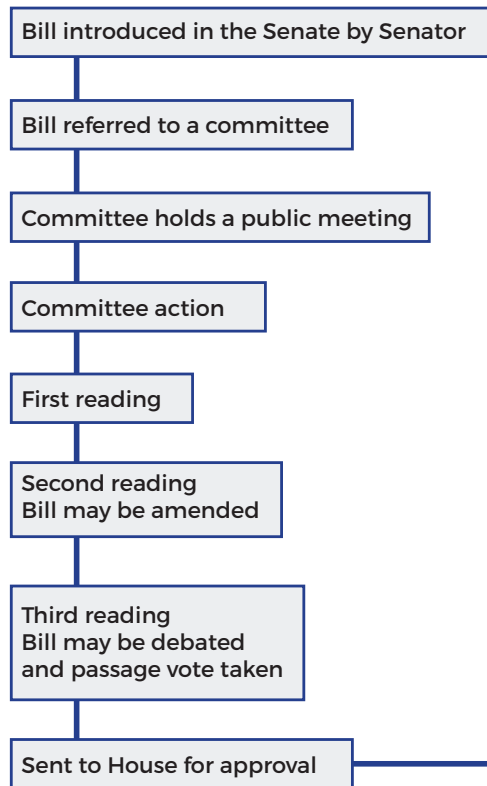
The chart on the next page provides an overview of the legislative process.

Important points in the legislative process:

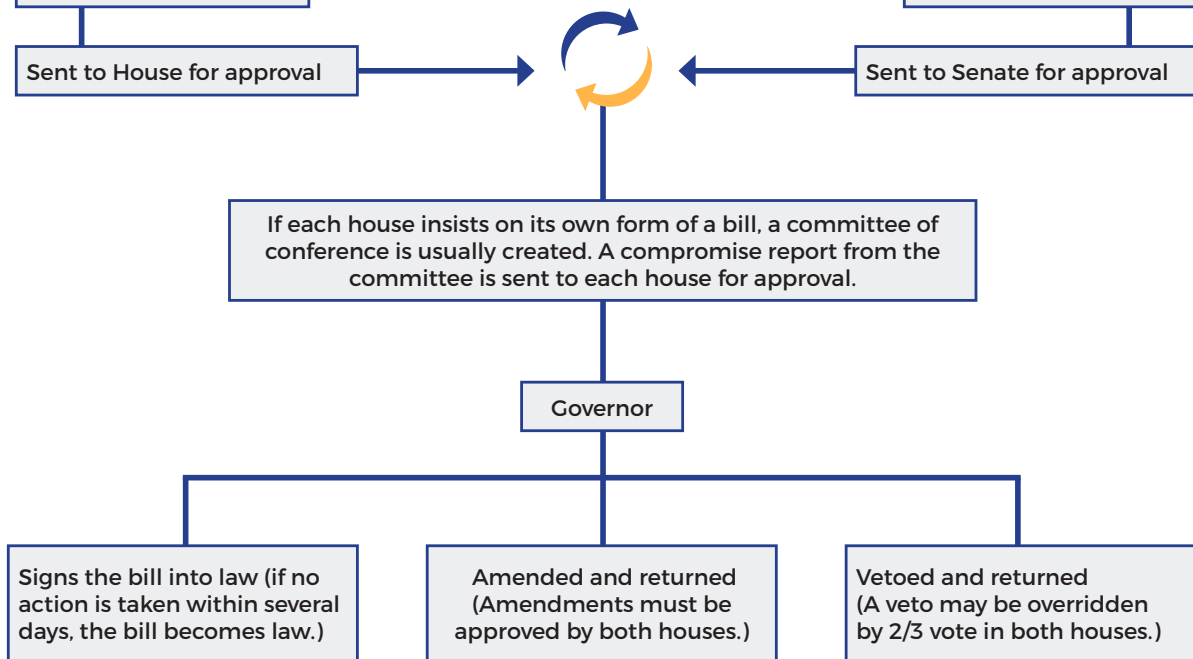
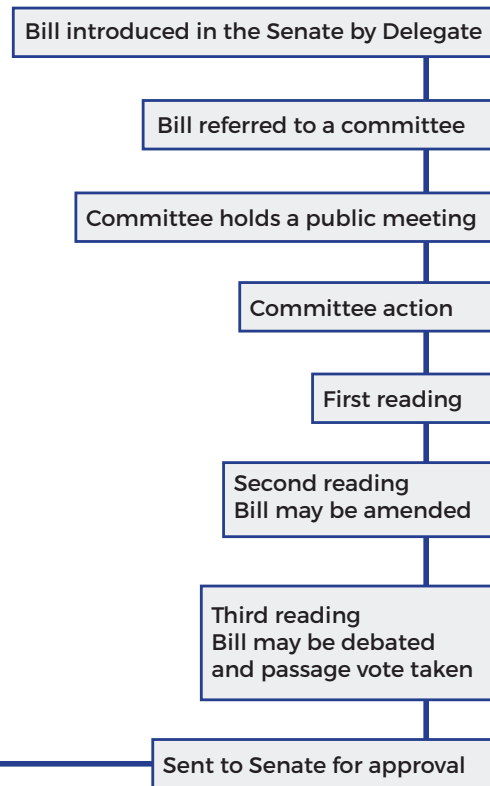
- ▶ What is the impetus for the legislation to be introduced? What perceived problem is being addressed? Often, coaching is casually tossed in legislation pertaining to psychology either due to ignorance of the profession or at the request of psychologists. If we need to be regulated, they reason, then coaches do too. ICF advocacy has consistently distinguished between psychology and coaching.
- ▶ Unless there is a motivation to get something done quickly (e.g., the end of the legislative session or trying to pass something controversial quickly), there is ample time built in for citizen input. Legislators genuinely want to hear from you. Passing unpopular legislation is not a recipe for reelection.
- ▶ Even if legislation passes each house, there is still an opportunity to be involved in the conference to effect change to bill's final version. Be active and be persistent!



## Senate



## House of Delegates



Source: hamptoncivics.wikispaces.com

## Section 5: How to Influence your Elected Officials

You've learned of an issue involving the regulation of coaching. You've alerted your ICF Chapter Leader, who has in turn contacted the Regulatory Liaison Network and ICF staff. After quickly researching the issue you are asked, as a constituent of the committee chair considering the legislation, to contact your elected official and urge them to make changes favorable to the treatment of the coaching profession.

### What do you do?

The response can be multifaceted, depending on the timeline for the bill's consideration. We'll examine some ways to contact your elected official, what contact is appropriate at what time, and the pros and cons of each approach.

### In-Person

There are several ways to connect with elected officials in person:

- ▶ Determine when the official will be in the district and having a public meet-and-greet event.

Elected officials at all levels of government love to meet with constituents. You are their employer and connecting with them provides feedback they need to do their jobs (and get your vote in the next election).

Positive aspects of the in-person visit:

- The legislator gets to put a name to the face: You become a “real person” to the official rather than a voice on the phone or an email address. The issue isn't abstract anymore. The legislator can point to someone who is impacted by his decision. This makes the issue more relevant.
- It demonstrates commitment. By taking time out of your schedule and making an effort to meet the legislator and communicate your views in person, you demonstrate your depth of passion and the seriousness of the issue.

However, there are downsides to an in-person meeting:

- Unless the meeting is at the legislator's local office, you may be lost in the crowd. In a sea of faces, your views may get lost. If the meeting is in an office setting, it's likely that staff (or the legislator) will take notes for follow-up. In this case, the depth of connection is worth the effort.
- The meeting itself will be meaningless without timely, in-depth follow-up on your part. Legislators generally do not have bill details handy, and details can get easily confused. In the best-case scenario, you may sit down in a legislator's office, make the case for the legislation and answer questions from the legislator and/or staff. Afterward, you need to follow up with the account of the meeting—who you are, what you discussed, the points you made and the questions you answered or were raised for your follow-up—and a request for another meeting before the bill gets considered to discuss issues the legislator may be encountering and what ICF's response is.

In short, in-person meetings can be a valuable tool, depending on their context. In-person meetings forge important relationships and provide vital educational opportunities, and timely and in-depth follow-up is paramount.

## Phone calls

- ▶ According to a 2015 Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) survey of almost 200 senior congressional staffers, when it comes to influencing a lawmaker's opinion, personalized emails, personalized letters and editorials in local newspapers all beat out the telephone.

It seems easy: Look up the phone number, make a 30- to 45-second phone call to your elected official, congratulate yourself on making a difference, and get on with your day.

However, you may not really have accomplished anything.

The CMF survey findings say it all. If you phone a congressional office or a state office, you'll be talking to a staffer or, in some cases, an intern. They'll note your name and contact information and your stance on the issue (sometimes a basic for/against tally sheet).

Pros of making a phone call to a legislator's office:

- You have registered your stance on the issue.
- You have provided contact information to the official's office, which means that you may receive updates and information from the office that could lead to future contact.

Cons of making a phone call to a legislator's office:

- Your message is filtered through someone that may not have legislative experience.
- Phone calls are only part of the staff's time. There are also meetings, correspondence, hearings, etc. While the staff wants to hear from you, the calls are intrusive and it's difficult to make a series of points and have them transcribed perfectly. Instead of making technical points and spending time understanding the issues, the staff may be trying to get you off the phone quickly to get to the next thing.

Phone calls are better than no communication at all but should be a last resort.

## Email/letters

- ▶ According to *The New Yorker*, members of the U.S. Senate received 6.4 million citizen letters through the U.S. Postal Service in 2016.

According to CMF's survey of senior congressional staffers, personalized letters and emails are the most effective communication tools, with emails edging out letters.

Why are personalized emails so effective?

1. They can be easily archived, stored, searched and forwarded to relevant staff.
2. Persuasive arguments are much better made in writing than in person or over the phone.
3. Email is thorough and not as intrusive as phone calls.

The key word here is "personalized." Staff who receive copied-and-pasted form emails get bored of them quickly. They are important for volume of response, but the points you make may be tuned out simply because they assume that your understanding of or investment in the issue is limited.

In an email, points to emphasize include:

- ▶ You are a constituent.
- ▶ You work with other constituents in the district (e.g., as clients).

- ▶ You own/operate a small business or sole proprietorship (if applicable).
- ▶ How long you've been a coach, how much training you've had, the number of clients you've assisted and your involvement in ICF.

Share talking points provided by ICF on the issue. The more details, the better. The legislator needs to be assured that a system of self-regulation exists that would be too time-consuming, too expensive or require more expertise than the legislator has immediately available to replicate or replace.

Offer yourself as a resource on the issue and urge your legislator to contact you for additional information. Your goal is to position yourself as their go-to subject-matter expert on coaching and the coaching industry.

Like emails, the more personal a letter is, the better. However, letters are secondary to emails because:

- ▶ Going through a sack of letters requires more time than reading a similar number of emails.
- ▶ Mail is screened heavily for security purposes. This could lead to a slight delay in letters getting to the right office. This is no problem if you have sufficient lead time but can be a problem if your communication is time-sensitive.
- ▶ The routing process for letters takes longer. The legislator or staffer to whom the letter should be routed will be the second or third stop for a physical letter. Since many offices have automated email systems, the routing is more direct via email.

Pros of sending a personalized email/letter to a legislator:

- ▶ Ease of response
- ▶ Ease of internal communication
- ▶ Ability to explain technical points in writing rather than in person or via phone

Cons of sending personalized emails/letters:

- ▶ Volume received
- ▶ Risk of being skimmed quickly instead of receiving individual time and attention
- ▶ Letters require extra time and attention for response

### **Letters to the Editor**

Legislators at all levels of government must keep track of news in the communities they serve. They, and their staffs, monitor local news coverage closely.

Letters to the editor may sound like an “old school,” pre-Internet mode of influence—and they are. They are also extremely effective at generating attention and support.

Imagine your state is considering regulation of the coaching profession. You've established contact with the office, made the points regarding self-regulation and offered yourself as a resource for additional input and information.

You also send a letter to the editor making the same points and noting that self-regulation for the coaching profession works and that state regulation will likely reduce the number of coaches and negatively impact individuals and organizations that use coaches.

Your local newspaper publishes your letter. Because of your compelling argument, the state's small-business advocacy group contacts you or ICF, wanting more information on the issue. After learning more about ICF's comprehensive system for self-regulation, they urge the state to lessen the burden on small businesses (and coaches in particular). Others in the state, including businesses that may have utilized coaches for their employees, join in the argument, saying that their professional well-being is jeopardized if coaches move or close their businesses due to increased regulation.

This example is not typical, but neither is it outlandish. By drawing attention to the situation by writing a well-reasoned, logical letter to the editor, you've gained allies with shared interests outside of the coaching profession. You've built a coalition that is difficult for legislators to ignore.

Tips for successful letters to the editor:

- ▶ Make it punchy. There generally is a word limit, so avoid exposition and extraneous words. Start out strong and be active and forceful.
- ▶ Make one point well rather than 3 points badly. Choose your most important message (e.g., "Self-regulation is preferable to piecemeal state regulations,") and make that the focus of your letter.
- ▶ Point interested parties to the ICF website's regulation landing page for more information: <https://coachfederation.org/regulation>.

Pros of writing letters to the editor:

- ▶ A letter to the editor gets your point on the record and can be referred to by other media.
- ▶ Published letters will be seen by relevant stakeholders.
- ▶ Other coaches see it and are assured that the Association is acting on the issue. This may lead to more grassroots activity.
- ▶ Letters to the editor can lead to coalition-building and coordinated activity with other interested parties.

Cons of writing letters to the editor:

- ▶ There can be a lag time between when the letter is received and published—if it's published at all.
- ▶ It can be hard to communicate a complex, multifaceted issue in 250 words.

A letter to the editor is most effective as part of a coordinated set of activities. It's not a standalone activity that will change a legislator's mind on its own.

## Section 6: ICF Members in Action – Case Studies

Several times in the last few years, ICF Chapter Leaders, Members and staff have responded to inquiries from governmental bodies considering the regulation of coaching and worked with Regulatory Liaisons and other ICF Members to advocate for the self-regulation of coaching.

In the US, ICF was involved in advocacy activities in three states:

### Texas

Early in the legislation cycle, ICF became aware of a measure that, as written, would potentially redefine psychology and impact a coach's ability to practice. With efforts led by members from

local ICF Chapters, we participated in numerous negotiations over the course of many weeks. As a result, we are confident that coaches in the state will not be impacted at the current time. The legislation will only impact individuals who falsely claim that they are psychologists.

### **Minnesota**

A bill was introduced that would modify existing statutes regarding the licensure of psychologists in the state. As written, it had the potential to limit the practice of coaching to licensed psychologists in the state. After weeks of action from local coaches, ICF was invited to meet with members of the Minnesota State Legislature and representatives of the Minnesota Board of Psychology. During this meeting, it became clear that the Minnesota Psychological Association was not interested in coaching being regulated in the state. In response to ICF's concerns, the Minnesota Psychological Association provided a letter that offered further clarification around the proposed legislation. We do not anticipate any immediate impact to coaches in the state.

### **Oregon**

An amendment to a bill was proposed that, if passed as written, would have required Life Coaches, Parenting Coaches, and Wellness Coaches to be licensed and regulated in the state, which is unprecedented. However, due to the great work of ICF Oregon and ICF Members and Credential-holders in the state, the proposed amendment was not added to the bill.

## **Conclusion**

Citizen advocacy is important for you, your practice, your clients and your colleagues. ICF provides you with support and tools necessary to interact with policymakers and ensure that you have the most favorable atmosphere in which to practice your profession.

The ICF Global community takes the ethics of professional coaching very seriously, and our robust system of professional self-governance ensures that ICF Members and Credential-holders meet high standards and that coaching consumers are well-protected.

ICF leaders and staff are ready to assist ICF Chapters and individual members in addressing concerns about potential or actual regulation. We hope that this handbook will be an additional resource for coaches in the USA to leverage in their pursuit of continued professional self-governance.