Advocacy with Legislators
Why?
Talking with elected officials about issues important to you can make a difference!

Contacting your elected officials is an effective way to be heard and involved in our political process.

Meeting in person, calling, and writing emails or letters are ways to make sure your ideas are heard. Legislators keep track of what is important to the people they represent.
Know Who They Are

Find out who represents you in the state legislature. You have a member of the Michigan Senate and Michigan House of Representatives. To find their names and contact information go to:  
http://www.house.mi.gov/mhrpublic/ for the House of Representatives  
http://www.senate.michigan.gov/fysenator/fysenator.htm for the Senate

Senator  
Tonya Schuitmaker  
District 20

Representative  
Brian Banks  
District 1

Before contacting your legislators it is helpful to learn about their interests and positions on proposed laws. Most legislators have web pages and many have an email list you can join.
Prepare Your Issues

Do Your Homework
Plan what you want to share and how you will present it. With proposed bills that you support or oppose, find out as much as you can.

Tips:

1. If you are worried about funding cuts to a program, learn about the program and the planned cuts before you make contact.

2. If you plan to talk about a certain bill, identify it by the bill number.

SENATE BILL No. XXX
House Bill No. XXXX
3. Make sure you know what the bill proposes and how it will affect you and people you know.

4. If you are with a group, give tasks to group members to be fully prepared (calling, emailing, letters, research, note taking).
Making a Visit

1. Schedule the visit by phone or email

   - Be clear about why you want to visit – ask for no more than 15-20 minutes. Tell how many people will be with you when you ask for the visit.

   - Be patient – if you don’t receive a return call or email right away, don’t be discouraged. Wait a week or so and try again.

2. Getting Ready

   - If you are part of a group, select a person to do the talking & bring no more than four members
• Practice what you want to say, be brief

• Leave time for questions

• Bring materials to share

3. Your Visit
• Be on time

• Be professional and polite
• Do not feel bad if you meet with a member of your legislator’s staff. They often help decide what topics are brought to a busy legislator. In some cases, staff members may know more about your issues.

• Answer questions and offer help

4. After Your Visit
• Follow up on anything you said you would do
• Send a thank you note
Making a Telephone Call

A phone call is another way to speak to your legislator, especially if there is not time to schedule a visit or send a letter or email. You will probably speak with a staff member.

During your call:
- Say your name
- With bills, identify it by the bill number
  
  **SENATE BILL No. XXX**
  **House Bill No. XXXX**
- Share how you feel about the issue
- Always be prepared and clear
- Like visits, be brief and focused
• Be polite and give your contact information. They may want to call you back or send an email.

Usually, the legislator’s staff will make a note of your comments. In some cases they may want to know why you feel the way you do. They may ask you to send an email listing your concerns. If you don’t have a computer, let them know.
Sending a Letter or Email

Letters or emails are also useful ways to let your legislator know how you feel about issues.

- Like a visit, keep letters and emails short but tell how you will be affected.

- If you are writing about a bill, list the bill number.

  **SENATE BILL No. XXX**
  **House Bill No. XXXX**

- Do not use form letters and emails because they are not thought to be as meaningful as a personal note.
Sometimes, when a legislative hearing or vote is about to take place – a personal email may be the fastest way to make contact.

Sample Letter:

Dear Senator Stabenow,

My name is Ryan Nicholas Gray. As a self-determined individual with a disability, I am disappointed that you have not discussed self-determination in the U.S. Senate.

It is important to me that my elected representative supports and upholds self-determination rights for people with disabilities.

Self-determination matters to me because it gives people with disabilities the authority to participate in the democratic process, confirms their responsibility and right to determine their own destiny, teaches them to wisely budget the public funds allocated to them, provides them with the freedom to work, volunteer, and vote as they wish, and maintains the support network needed to provide our services.

In my life, self-determination has made a significant difference. Because of self-determination, I have been able to interview local reporter Karen Drew on a television show that I co-host, I have won awards for volunteering and public
service, and I’ve been able to participate in Speech Crafters, a local program that helps me to develop my public speaking skills. None of this would have happened without Community Living Services of Oakland County or their self-determination program — I would not have even known my own rights.

I hope that you and your colleagues can find the opportunity to think about what I’ve presented today and that you can make services for people with disabilities a priority.

Thank you.

Ryan Nicholas Gray
After Your Contact

Keep it Up!
Your Senator or Representative need to hear from you on a regular basis to know what you want.

- Don’t feel bad if your legislator votes against something you supported.

- Be ready to repeat this process again the next time you visit, call, or write.

- Politics and creating bills changes. You never know when your issues might be the same as those of your legislator.

- Developing an on-going relationship is helpful.
• As you visit and/or write your legislator you get to know their interests and they get to know yours.

• It is helpful to know how your legislator votes.

• If your legislator votes in favor of something you support, send a brief email or letter of thanks. It is important that your legislators know that you follow their voting record.
### Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bill</strong></td>
<td>A new law or change to an existing law.</td>
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<td><strong>Constituents</strong></td>
<td>People represented by a legislator. For example if you live in Senator Schuitmaker’s district, you are one of her constituents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District</strong></td>
<td>Districts are an area of a town or county. They are set up based on the number of people in an area to make sure Senators and Representatives have an equal number of people.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Form Letter or Email</strong></td>
<td>Pre-written letter that you only need to sign. Not as useful as a personal letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legislators</strong></td>
<td>Members of the Michigan House of Representatives or Senate. Each legislator represents a part of Michigan called a district and each district is numbered.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Legislature</strong></td>
<td>Senate and House of Representatives, with 38 members in the Senate and 110 members in the House of Representatives. Every person in Michigan lives in a specific Senate and House District, and is represented by one Senator and one Representative.</td>
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Resource List

- To find out if you are registered to vote go to:
  https://webapps.sos.state.mi.us/mivote/votersearch.aspx

- To find the name and contact information for your Michigan Representative go to:
  http://www.house.mi.gov/mhrpublic/

- To find the name and contact information for your Michigan Senator go to:
  http://www.senate.michigan.gov/fysenator/fysenator.htm

- To find your U.S. Senators (you have 2) go to:
  http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm?State=MI

- To find your U.S. Representative go to:
  http://www.house.gov/representatives/ in the upper right hand corner next to a picture of the U.S. is a place to enter your zip code.

- Citizen’s Guide to State Government - Michigan:

- Our Government – the Legislative Branch (U.S.)
  http://www.whitehouse.gov/our-government/legislative-branch

- Michigan – How a Bill Becomes a Law
  http://www.michigan.gov/som/0,4669,7-192-29701_29704-2836--00.html
- **U.S. How a Bill Becomes a Law**
  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKvY0Q3tI6I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKvY0Q3tI6I)

- **To look up Michigan Bills**

- **To look up U.S. Bills** [http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php](http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php)
# Tear Off Work Sheet

## 1. Your Elected Officials

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Contact Info</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff Member</td>
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<td>Contact Info</td>
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## 2. Your Issues

- **What do you support or oppose?**
- **Bill Number and author**

## 3. Why do you support or oppose

- **Personal story, work experience, or official position**
  1. 
  2. 
  3. 

- **Suggestions or Recommendations**

- **Answers to questions you might be asked**
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