

BUDGET PRIORITIES AND BILLS

Priority issues for the budget that come before the Legislature **every year** include Salaries for Direct Care Workers, Family Support, Employment, Turning 22, Autism, Special Education, PCA, Day Habilitation among others. Communications from families can have a strong impact on the **size** of these

4. PUT IT IN WRITING

If you are not able to visit your legislators, you can always write letters or email. **And make no mistake -- legislators read mail from their constituents.** Letters from families can really add up, and they get added up. They can directly impact votes and action.

If you or your family member have a present or future need for state services, write each of your legislators several times a year, stating in your own words your loved one's problems and needs.

If you do not have a computer, don't worry. A clearly hand-written letter is fine. **Keep it short but be candid.**

Continually urge your legislators to vote for key bills and budgets affecting your family. **Be specific.** Explain exactly how they can help you or your family member

Be sure to include your full name and address on your letter. Use this informal salutation:

(Sen.) (Rep.) John Smith
State House
Room xxx
Boston, MA 02133

Dear (Sen.) (Rep.) Smith:

Ask for a reply and for your legislator's positions on the issues. **You are entitled to know where they stand.**

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5. KEEP THEIR PHONES RINGING OFF THE HOOK

Phone calls from constituents are the **lifeblood** of the legislative process. They can be made quickly and painlessly. Calls should be timed to influence votes on budgets or bills that will be important to your needs or those of your family member. All legislators keep logs on phone calls. And they add them up!

To find the best times to call on issues of importance to you, use the Information Sources. (see back cover)

When you call, state your name, address, and that you are a constituent then your message. Keep it brief and to the point. **Don't hesitate** to ask your legislator how he or she plans to vote on any given issue. If you cannot reach your legislator, leave your message or question with an aide.

Join other advocates and parents. Keep the State House phones ringing. **Raise your voices clearly, loudly and in unison.**

Thank your legislators when they support your requests. Always be **courteous**. Treat them as allies.

Finally, on the **most urgent issues**, call the State House Leadership as well. (see back cover)

LET THE GOVERNOR HEAR FROM YOU

While this folder focuses on communications with legislators, don't neglect to voice your concerns and opinions to the Governor. Here too a strong united voice from families can make a difference.

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Phone Numbers and Email Addresses

(Keep this brochure near your telephone or computer)

This brochure belongs to: _____

My State Senator: _____

State House phone and Email: _____

My State Representative: _____

State House phone and Email: _____

For the above information, check Clerks' offices (provided in "Establish Contact" section) or visit <http://www.capwiz.com/thearc/ma/home/> (pick Elected Officials).

STATE HOUSE LEADERSHIP: PHONE

- **Governor Deval Patrick**.....617 725-4005
<http://www.mass.gov/contactus>
- **Senate President Therese Murray**.....617 722-1500
Therese.Murray@masenate.gov
- **Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo**...617 722-2500
Robert.DeLeo@mahouse.gov
- **Chair, Sen. Ways & Means Comm**.....617 722-1540
Stephen.Brewer@masenate.gov
- **Chair, House Ways & Means Comm**....617 722-2990
Brian.Dempsey@mahouse.gov

INFORMATION SOURCES:

For schedules, bills, budgets, legislative matters:
The Arc of Massachusetts.....arcmass@arcmass.org
217 South Street, Waltham, MA 02453
781 891-6270
www.arcmass.org

Department of Developmental Services
www.mass.gov/dds
500 Harrison Avenue, Boston, MA 02118

Office of Citizen Leadership.....617 624-7755

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COMMUNICATING

with State Legislators



Drawing by an individual with an intellectual disability

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Prepared by parents associated with The Arc of Massachusetts, in cooperation with the Department of Developmental Services Citizen Boards and an advisory group of lawmakers.

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What the Legislators Say

- “Keep the letters, e-mails and phone calls coming. They **motivate** and **educate** legislators to vote for your cause.”
- “You can help legislators put **human faces** on issues and statistics. Tell us your family’s stories. Come visit. Send us letters and pictures. Believe me, you’ll get our attention.”
- “Heartfelt letters from individuals and parents are difficult to ignore. Large numbers of them are **impossible to ignore.**”
- “Especially in times of shrinking resources for government services and competition for scarce public funds, it is a necessity for citizens to give the **highest visibility** to their personal issues. **You** are the best qualified to keep your family member’s needs on the legislative front burner. Visit us, call us, write us and **do it often.** Urge other families to do likewise.”
- “Whatever the budget crisis, our government must **never** neglect our most vulnerable citizens. **Do not** let us ever forget that!”

*“Every letter—every e-mail—every visit—every phone call counts. **Yours** may be the one that tips the vote.”*

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Why Is It So Important for You to Communicate with Your Legislators?

Economic trends of recent times make it essential that advocacy efforts by individuals, families and supporters get stepped up significantly if we are to maintain a high quality service system for individuals and families with disabilities.

The **lives of almost all persons** with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our Commonwealth are affected by legislation and budgets passed by the State Legislature. Dozens of bills on disability issues are filed and voted on, and the **entire budget** of the Department of Developmental Services, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, Medicaid and others must be appropriated **every year.**

You are your best advocate. Nobody knows more about the need for services than you do. Nobody can describe them better than you can. It’s part of your **empowerment** to send your message to your legislators and urge them to pass laws and budgets that serve you or your family member and others with similar needs.

In good times we can **enhance** the necessary funding. In bad times we must **protect** what we have and maintain high visibility for our issues.

How your State Senator and State Representative vote on key bills and appropriations depends not only on how many families they hear from on each given issue—but **also how strongly, clearly and in unison these voices are raised.**

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Follow These Steps to Maintain Effective Communications with your Legislators

1. ESTABLISH CONTACT AND KEEP IT GOING

If you do not know who your State legislators are, find out online or by calling the State House:

Senate Clerk: 617-722-1276

House of Representatives Clerk: 617-722-2356

Web: malegislature.gov/people/search

Write down their full names, phone numbers and email addresses on the back of this pamphlet.

Begin your communication by sending each of your legislators a short letter to establish contact. Identify yourself by name and state your needs or those of your family member. Ask them for their support and **keep in touch.**

2. STAY ON TOP OF WHAT’S HAPPENING

Familiarize yourself with bills and budget line items related to disability policy so that you can communicate with your legislators on a well-informed and timely basis.

Check with local advocacy groups. Network with other individuals or parents on issues of mutual importance. Get on email lists and if you don’t have a computer, on mailing lists.

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*The **better informed** you are, the **better advocate** you will be for yourself or your family member.*

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ADVOCACY YEAR-ROUND PRODUCES RESULTS

A key time to write legislators is during the first few months of the year to comment on the Governor’s budget, the House budget, and the Senate budget. We must also **maintain visibility year-round.** When we work together throughout the year we get results, as demonstrated by two State House rallies and a previous letter campaign which substantially restored huge budget cuts.

3. VISIT WHEN AND IF YOU CAN

The best way to connect with your legislators is face-to-face, especially if you or your son or daughter has an **urgent or long-standing need** for state services. Phone for an appointment in the State House or at the legislator’s meeting place in his or her home district near you. At your meeting, state the needs briefly but emphatically and outline **specifically how** he or she **can help.** Bring written material and photos you can leave with the legislator. After the meeting, be sure to send a short thank-you note.

Even without an appointment, you can drop in to a legislator’s State House office and speak with an aide, most of whom are **well-informed** and **anxious to listen** to constituents. They will be glad to pass on your message.

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Try to visit the State House for rallies, receptions, public hearings, and/or other opportunities to meet lawmakers as well as other advocates. Many advocacy groups have legislative events in their own localities. These activities provide **strength in numbers** and **generate new ideas.** Access event schedules through the Information Sources. (see back cover)

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