



A Self-Advocate's Guide to Advocacy

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What Is Advocacy?

Advocacy is about speaking up for yourself and your community to influence decisions that affect your life. This can include sharing your story, supporting legislation, or contacting elected officials to express your views.

Who Are Your Legislators?

Legislators are people we vote for and elect to **make laws and decide how government money is spent**. You are represented at both the state and federal levels. State and federal officials work on different issues but are elected to represent the views and opinions of constituents.

- Find your **State** legislators [here](#).
- Find your **Federal** legislators [here](#).

Ways to Advocate

There are many different ways to advocate. It is important that you choose the method that feels most comfortable for you. You could:

- Send an email or letter
- Make a phone call
- Attend a hearing
- Visit the State House or Congress and meet with your legislator
- Share your personal story on social media

These are just a few examples of the many ways to advocate! If you have other ideas or need support, please reach out to Emilia Niyangoda at eniyangoda@arcmass.org.

How Often Should You Contact Legislators?

You can contact your legislators when an issue matters to you or when you have new information to share. If they do not respond, it is okay to follow up after a few weeks. Contacting them more than once about the same issue can help, especially if each message has a clear purpose, like sharing your personal experience or asking them to take specific action. It is better to send thoughtful, meaningful messages than to contact them very often. Being clear and respectful helps make sure your message is taken seriously.

How to Communicate Effectively

It is important that you introduce yourself, explain the issue and why it matters to you, share your personal experience, and share what actions you would like the legislator to take. Your lived experience is a powerful tool in advocacy. When you are in communication with your legislators, be sure to state that you are a constituent and share your contact information with them.

For more information on storytelling, check out our [storytelling fact sheet](#) and this [storytelling toolkit](#).

Preparing for a Meeting

If you schedule a meeting with a legislator, it is important that you research the legislator and the issue beforehand. Make a list of questions and the issues you want to discuss, so you stay focused during the meeting.

It can also be helpful to look at the legislator's past work. You can review bills they have supported before. This can help you understand what issues matter to them and how your issue may connect to their work. After the meeting, sending a thank-you note or email with any additional information or materials can make your meeting more impactful!

Visiting the State House

- **Dress:** There is no dress code for visiting the State House; however, it is common to dress professionally or in business casual clothing.
- **Preparation:** Bring notes on the issues you are discussing and research the room numbers of legislators beforehand.
 - For room numbers and more information about the legislature, visit: <https://malegislature.gov/>
- **Support:** You may choose to bring a family member, friend, or support person with you to feel more comfortable.

Tips for Staying Motivated

It is important to understand that **passing legislation can be a slow process**. It is normal to feel discouraged when the legislation you care about is moving slowly. Advocacy works, and you can make a big difference.

Advocacy can take time, and there is no single “right” way to advocate. Celebrate the smaller victories, because small actions matter and add up over time. Your voice has power and, together, we can make a difference!

Resources and Advocacy

To learn more about advocacy, check out our [Advocacy Resource Center](#). To learn more about the state and federal issues that affect our community, visit our [State and Federal Policy Issues](#) webpage, which contains fact sheets on issues including Medicaid, Immigration, SNAP, the Department of Education, Social Security, and more. Sign up for our action alerts to advocate directly to your elected officials.

- [The Arc of Massachusetts Action Alerts](#) (state issues)
- [The Arc of the United States Action Alerts](#) (federal issues)

Reach out to us if you have questions or need support.

- Nora Bent, Director of Government Affairs and Strategic Partnerships: nbent@arcmass.org
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