

The Great Start Parent Coalition's *Advocacy Basics*

What is Advocacy?

Identifying, embracing, and promoting a cause.

What is the purpose of Advocacy?

To inform or educate others about an issue; to promote action and motivate others; to win change.

Why should you get involved?

We need to speak up for those people - especially children - who cannot speak as loudly for themselves. Government policies and budgets affect everyone. Legislators and leaders need our expertise and input, as parents, childcare providers, and invested community members, to understand how money should be used and what policies should be enacted to meet the needs of all children and families in our community.

What you need to know:

- **The problem or issue:** Understand the background, context, and story of the issue. Who does this affect? How does it affect them? Why is it important?
- **The goal:** Have a clear idea of what you are asking people to do and accomplish.
- **The players:** Who can give you what you want. Who is in control and makes the ultimate decisions?
- **The timeline:** When should you target your efforts? Is there a particular time that is more effective or convenient for all involved?
- **The appeal:** How can you get others to listen to you, understand, and join you in your efforts?

Effective ways to communicate with legislators:

The legislators who attended the Great Start Parent Coalition's "Legislative Night 2014" gave us these tips for communicating with policy makers:

- **Contact your representatives in any way you want**
Constituents can communicate with their legislators' offices in any way they prefer, including emails, phone calls, office hours or coffee hours, face to face meetings, letters, or through their website: <http://house.michigan.gov/>
- **Leave your contact information**
The legislators will respond personally, so always leave information for how to reach you, preferably your phone number.
- **Craft a convincing argument**
 - Be respectful. Emotion is wonderful and effective, but we must make sure that we come across calm and respectful, no matter how passionate we are.
 - Be concise and direct. Get to the point quickly and clearly, so that they know immediately what it is we are asking for and why.
 - Use facts and statistics to support and inform. Whenever possible, give the context of an issue using available data.
- **Personalize!**
Try to avoid using "form letters" (letters written in a generalized template that are not individualized to their recipient or, often, their sender). Tell your own story. How does this topic affect you and your family or community? Why is this important to you? The legislators value each of their constituents as individual people and love to hear our stories.