

HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CAUSE IN MARYLAND

Advocacy can be as basic as speaking up for yourself or others to get something done. This can mean vocalizing the needs of children and families to your local officials, state-elected officials, or federal policy-makers.

This guide will help you learn more about legislative advocacy.

How to be an Advocate:

Make sure you are talking to the correct person:

The Maryland General Assembly includes two houses—the house of delegates and the state senate. Each legislative district in Maryland is represented by one state senator and three delegates. You can identify your representatives by:

- Visiting the Maryland General Assembly website at www.mlis.state.md.us. Click on the “Find your legislator” link and enter your home address. The website will provide the names of your senator and delegates.
- Call your city or county Board of Elections. You can find the number at www.elections.state.md.us/about/county_boards.html.

Ways to reach your legislators

Now that you’ve identified your legislators, it’s time to contact them and express your views on budgets, program issues, and legislation. You can contact them by phone, letter or email. The best address or phone number to use is a legislator’s interim office. That information can be found at www.mlis.state.md.us. Click on “roster” and then click on “legislators address roster.”

By phone

The quickest way to contact your legislator is by phone. There are a few simple steps to follow for making a quick and effective phone call to your legislator.

- Be prepared to leave a message. Do not expect to speak directly with your legislators or their staff.
- Please identify yourself as a constituent.
- When leaving a message you must include:
 - Your name and address
 - The name and number of the legislation you are calling about
 - What action you want the legislator to take on the issue: support or oppose and why



One of the most important ways to advocate for others is by registering to vote, which allows you to identify yourself to your legislators as a constituent.

The Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities is one of a national network of University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) federally funded by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. We are committed to helping people with developmental disabilities maximize their potential and enjoy success in community life.



Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities
at Kennedy Krieger Institute

Maximizing Potential. Creating Change.

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Write a letter or send an email

Written communications are highly effective and allow you to elaborate on issues you believe in and which actions you want the legislators to take. To write most effectively, follow these steps:

- Use the appropriate greeting, such as, "Dear Senator or Delegate (last name)"
- Get right to the facts and keep it simple. Include the name and number of the legislation you are calling about and what action you want the legislator to take on the issue: support or oppose and why
- Always be respectful, polite, and thankful for their time

***Helpful hint:** Sample letters and messages may often be found on websites for local advocacy groups.

Testify to your legislators

Testifying before a legislative committee in Annapolis is crucial to making your voice heard and allows our elected officials to put a face to the issues. There are two ways to testify—in person or in writing. Listed below are some helpful tips for testifying.

- In person:
 - Arrive early and submit your intent to testify at least 1.5 hours before the hearing.
 - Dress accordingly, turn cell phones OFF, and do not have outside conversations.
 - When testifying, speak clearly in the microphone.
 - Be aware of the allotted time for each speaker. There is usually a three-minute maximum allowed for all speakers, other than committee members or other legislators.
 - When speaking, always begin your statements with a respectful address, such as, "Good afternoon Mister or Madam Chairperson and distinguished members of the committee."
 - If you have personal testimony, the use of visuals are very helpful in expressing your point.
- In writing:
 - When submitting testimony in writing, please submit 1.5 hours before the hearing.
 - The content is very similar to a written letter. It might be slightly longer, but should be no more than two pages.
 - Be sure it is clear, concise, and right to the point.