

## **INTRODUCTION TO ADVOCACY**

In order to make a difference in the supports and services that people with disabilities receive in Indiana and beyond, you need to become an effective advocate. Your voice, joined with that of many other people can make a change in the local community, in the state, and throughout the country.



There has been much progress since Stone Belt started in the 1950s, thanks to advocacy efforts on everyone's behalf. Advocating for the rights of people with disabilities means getting active and voicing concerns and proposals to the people in government who make the laws and determine the funding for supports and services.

"Advocacy" can mean many things, but in general, it refers to taking action. Advocacy simply involves speaking and acting on behalf of yourself or others. With your help, we can ensure the brightest future for individuals with disabilities and the people that support them.



Stone Belt Arc is a member of The Arc, which is the largest national community-based organization advocating for and serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. The Arc encompass all ages and more than 100 different diagnoses including autism, Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, and various other developmental disabilities.

With nearly 700 state and local chapters nationwide, The Arc is on the front lines to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families have the support and services they need to be fully engaged in their communities. The Arc works with its federation of state and local chapters to create an impressive network of human service agencies ensuring they have the strongest civil rights advocates promoting and protecting their needs at all levels.

This booklet is compiled with the help of resources from The Arc.



## **How can you make a difference?**

The following tips from The Arc will help you become a more effective advocate for people with disabilities:

### **Let your local officials hear your opinions**

As a citizen, your opinions help elected officials decide how to vote on issues. Let your elected officials know your opinions through letters, e-mails, phone calls, etc. Remember, they are very busy and you want your message to have as much impact as possible. For the most impact, your communication should be brief, clear and focused on just one issue.

### **Attend public meetings**

Meetings of the city council, county council, Indiana General Assembly, school board, etc., are open to the public. Attending these meetings helps keep you informed of the way public business is transacted and how the various elected officials interact. In addition, public meetings give citizens a good opportunity to give their opinions by speaking during the public feedback section of the meetings. Nearly all elected officials host public meetings. They are at schools, libraries, churches, etc. This is your opportunity to hear from your elected official what they are working on and to give your input on issues.

### **Letters to the editor**

Writing a letter to the editor is an effective way to publicly discuss an issue and influence the decisions of local officials. Every newspaper has different requirements for letters to the editor. In general, as with letters to elected officials, it is important to be brief, clear, and concise and focus on just one issue.

### **Join an advocacy group**

Joining an advocacy group is one way to increase your awareness to elected officials. You can often be more successful and have more fun working with a group. There are many disability-focused groups to consider joining: a local chapter of The Arc, a family support group, a neighborhood association, etc.



### **Register and vote**

This is critical! Voting is your most effective tool for local government involvement. By voting and supporting your chosen candidate, you send a message about the kind of government you want. To vote, a citizen must be registered. Registration to vote ends 29 days before each election. To register you must be 18 years old on the day of the election and you must be a citizen of the United States. You can register at your local city clerk's office, license branch, and many other government offices.

### **Be an informed voter**

This is more important than voting! Before you vote, it is essential to seek information on the candidates and their positions. Information is abundant during elections. Much information is available from political parties and candidates themselves. While this information is helpful, it is also important to get information from other sources, such as newspapers, web sites, public debates, advocacy groups you are interested in, etc.

### **Work for the political party or candidate of your choice**

Getting involved with a political party, or political candidate, gives you an inside track on the process. Every political party and candidate has plenty of work that needs to be done. You may be asked to make phone calls, stuff envelopes, hand out literature, staff a booth, work on Election Day, etc. Once you establish yourself as a reliable volunteer, you will have the opportunity to have your point of view listened to, and perhaps, acted upon by your party and your party's government officials.

Find your elected officials at this link:

<http://cqrcengage.com/thearc/app/lookup?0&m=9898&lookupInput>

## **Becoming an Advocate**

The people who are elected into public service seek office because they want to make a positive change — just like you. They are concerned with many things and often do not have in-depth knowledge about people with disabilities. Most times though, whether they are Democrats or Republicans, they do care about people with disabilities and want them to get good supports in their home communities. As an advocate, you can help them learn a

lot more about what good supports are and how they can assure that people with disabilities receive them.

## Get Involved in the Legislative Process

### Establish and Maintain Credibility

- Know the facts. Do your homework on the issues.
- Know the legislator's political views as well as you can. His/her past voting record and legislation he/she had introduced are important indicators.
- Know the opposition. Be familiar with what those with views different from your own are saying.
- Be prepared to respond to the opposing view.

### Establish Regular, Ongoing Communications

- Establish a relationship. Try not to talk to the legislator or staff for the first time when you want something.
- Be familiar with the process. It is important to understand how a bill becomes a law and where your issue is in the process.
- Maintain communications with your legislator. Let him/her know when you agree/disagree with his position on issues.
- Always be brief and get to the point of your communication.
- Compliment or thank your legislator when he/she votes the way you requested or did something for which you agree.
- Get to know the legislator's staff. They are very important in the political process and should not be undervalued.



### Be Proactive, Not Reactive

- Take the initiative to contact your legislator. RARELY, do legislators contact you.
- Offer ideas and share alternatives to the problem. If you disagree with the option presented in a bill you oppose, offer an alternative.
- Don't be self-serving. Legislators are generally just trying to do the right thing for the community as a whole.
- Be timely. Your options are more restricted the further into the legislative process you get.



## Calling Your Legislator

When the Indiana General Assembly is in session, you may occasionally be asked to telephone your legislator to advocate a position on high priority legislation. During the session, it is highly recommended you use the state house phone numbers for your local legislators.

### Guidelines to assist you in making these telephone calls

- Call the State House Switch Board or, if you know, the number for your local legislator.
- Ask to speak to the legislator. On many occasions, time does not permit legislators to receive telephone calls. Do not be offended by not being able to talk to your legislator on the first try.
- If your legislator is not available, ask to speak to his legislative assistant. You will normally find that the staff person is knowledgeable of the issues and pleased to speak to constituents.
- State the reason for the phone call. Use the bill number and subject matter when possible.
- State the position you want the legislator to take (support or oppose).
- Explain how the legislation affects you and your family. Briefly tell your story.
- Discuss only one issue per telephone call.
- Ask the legislator's position
- If the legislator's position is the same as yours, express agreement and thanks.
- If your position differs from the legislator's, offer some factual information and ask if there is any additional information you can provide that would change his/her mind.
- State the facts as you see them. Try not to get emotional.
- If appropriate, follow up the telephone call with a letter or e-mail to the legislator.

### Guidelines to assist you in sending e-mails

As an alternative to sending a letter through the postal service, you may wish to send an e-mail to your legislators on issues of importance to you. E-mails are not viewed any differently than letters by legislators or their staff, they see it as an important communication from a constituent.

Remember, your e-mail is just an electronic letter. Just because there are no page breaks on an e-mail, you should not ramble on about your issue. Here are some guidelines for using e-mail:

- Address your e-mail. Start with "Dear Representative/Senator ABC".
- Make your e-mail brief, friendly and respectful.
- State your issue and what you are asking clearly at the beginning.



- Refer to bill numbers when possible.
- Make it clear that you are a constituent.
- Briefly explain your interest in the legislation; its effect on you, your family or loved one, or other families in the district.
- Ask the Legislator for a response specifying his/her position and the reasoning.
- Ensure that you “sign” the e-mail with your name, address and phone number.
- If you are willing, Share your e-mail with The Arc. We can use your e-mail to demonstrate to the Legislators and others that there is a public interest on specific issues.

## **Guidelines to assist you in sending letters**

A personal letter is one of the most powerful tools you can use to advocate to a policy maker. It needs to be your own story and your own viewpoint.

- If you want them to pay attention, write to your own legislators. They listen to the people who live and vote in their districts (their "constituents").
- Be sure to include your full address so that they can write back. You may also want to include your phone, e-mail, or other contact information.
- Date your letter.
- Keep it short and simple. One page is best, two at most.
- In the first paragraph, explain who you are (if you're writing as a concerned individual or writing on behalf of an organization). Also explain why you are writing. If you're writing about a bill, include the bill name or subject and bill number.
- Explain your position. Use personal examples.
- Be clear about what you want the legislator to do.
- Ask for a response.
- Write on only one issue at a time.
- Make your tone positive.
- Follow up. Especially if they do what you ask, write again to say thanks.

**See sample letters at the end of this document.**

## **Guidelines to assist you in visiting a legislator**

It is very important to develop a relationship with your legislators. The following guidelines can assist you in making a visit with your local legislator:

- When possible, make an appointment. You can speak with the legislator’s secretary, legislative assistant or scheduler to get an appointment.



- You don't want to overwhelm the legislator with several different issues. Try to focus on one or two issues so you can have a good and thorough discussion.
- If you are meeting with a legislator to discuss specific legislation, review any background information and position statements you have available to you. Try to be aware of the opposing position and be prepared to comment.
- When talking with legislators, try to use bill numbers. As appropriate, ask or inform the legislators when a vote is expected before their committee or respective chambers. Make sure they know why you feel this legislation is important.
- Discuss with the legislator their positions on the issue and ask them how they plan to vote. It is important to know legislator's feelings even if they are inclined to vote contrary to your position.
- Get a commitment from the legislator. Don't take a legislator's politeness or consideration as a sign of agreement with your opinion. Ask the direct question – "Will you vote to support \*\*\*?"
- Continue working with your Legislator even if you disagree. Most legislators really do want to help and a positive relationship will pay off in the long run.
- When appropriate, request specific action from your legislator. If he/she does not serve on a key committee acting on your issue, request that they contact the chair of the appropriate committee.
- Always follow up your meeting with a legislator with a short note. Thank the legislator for their time and remind them of the issue again. If they made a commitment to you to vote a certain way, remind them of that as well. Don't go through your whole arguments again, be brief.
- If you made an appointment to speak with a legislator and at the last minute, they send their legislative assistant to meet with you that is okay. Legislative assistants play a key role in the process as well and you should not treat them any differently. Ask the same questions, give your same statements and ask them to get back with you once they discuss your meeting with the legislator.





## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

### The Legislative Process

The process a bill goes through to become law can be long and cumbersome. Following is an outline of the steps a bill goes through to become law in Indiana and the opportunities you have for input. This is a simplified model that may be applied to a bill introduced in the House or the Senate.

- You and your supporters present an idea for a new bill verbally or in writing to your legislator.
- The legislator decides to author the bill and meets with legal specialists from the Legislative Services Agency to draft the bill's language.
- Once drafted, the bill is introduced by the legislator into his/her respective chamber.
- Once introduced, the bill is assigned to the appropriate standing committee by the leader of the respected Chamber.
- Standing Committees hold public hearings where they hear comments on the bill and may approve, reject or make amendments (changes) to the bill. (The Chair of the Committee is responsible for scheduling the meetings and what bills will be heard)
- During the hearing, the chair of the committee may ask for public comments on the bill. This is your opportunity to stand up and voice an opinion about the language of the bill.
- The Chair will decide if any amendments will be made to the bill and will propose those amendments to be approved by the majority of the members of the committee.
- The Chair of the committee may take a vote on the bill if a quorum of committee members is present. A simple majority of members are needed for the bill to pass/fail.
- A report of the committee's action is submitted to the originating Chamber.
- The bill is eligible for second reading in the originating chamber on the second calendar day following the distribution of the committee report to the members.
- The bill is eligible for amendments on second reading by any member of the originating chamber. If any of the proposed amendments are accepted by the full chamber, the bill may be reprinted with the new language if deemed necessary.
- Once a bill passes second reading; it is eligible for third reading. At this stage of the process, the author presents the bill to the full chamber and the bill is debated by all members.
- During third reading, a roll call vote is taken. A constitutional majority is needed for a bill to pass on third reading. A vote less than the constitutional majority results in the bill failing to pass.
- A bill which successfully passes the originating chamber then moves to the second chamber to go through the same process.



- Once a bill passes the second chamber, any amendments must be approved by the originating chamber, before going to the Governor for his signature.
- A bill that moves through the second chamber without any amendments goes straight to the Governor's office for his signature.

## Government Affairs Terms and Definitions

**Amendment** – Any alteration to an original introduced bill proposed by either a committee or a legislator.

**BDDS** – Bureau of Developmental Disability Services

**Chamber** – Another word for House of Representatives or Senate. Also refers to the actual room where legislative action takes place.

**Citizen Legislature** – Indiana's General Assembly is classified as a citizen legislature. Lawmaking is not a full-time profession for the state's legislators. The most common occupations of Indiana legislators are attorneys, teachers, business owners and farmers.

**Concurrence** – Essentially, an agreement. The Senate and House must approve identical versions of a bill before it can become law. When a version of the bill has passed on house, it is sent to the other house for approval. The second house either concurs with the bill or makes its own amendments. If the Senate and House do not agree on an identical version, the bill is sent to a conference committee.

**Conference Committee** – For a bill to become law, it must be passed by both the House and Senate in the same form. If amendments are added to a bill in the second house and passed, a conference committee consisting of members of both houses is appointed to resolve the differences. If the conferees reach a compromise, the chambers vote on whether to accept the conference committee's decision. Generally, conference committees are comprised of two legislators from each chamber appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate and the speaker of the House. If the committee is unable to reach a compromise, the bill dies.

**DDRS** – Division of Disability and Rehabilitation Services

**Enacted** – A Bill is enacted when it is signed into law by the governor.

**Engrossed Bill** – After a bill has passed second reading it is "ordered to engrossment," or authenticated as the correct genuine bill to be considered on third reading.



**Enrolled Act** – After a bill has passed both houses in the same form, it is considered an enrolled act and ready for consideration by the governor.

**First Reading** – When a bill is introduced, it is ready for the first time and then referred to a standing committee to be considered.

**First Regular Session or Long Session** – The first session of every new General Assembly can last up to 61 working (session) days. Beginning in early January, this session cannot extend beyond April 30. Occurring in odd-numbered years, the first regular session is often called the “long session” because of the legislative approval process of Indiana’s biennial budget.

**FSSA** – Family and Social Services Administration

**General Assembly** – This refers to the joint meeting of the Senate and the House of Representatives during two consecutive years. General Assembly is also used as a synonym for the combined house of the Indiana legislature.

**Germane** – committee action and amendments to a bill must be germane (relevant) to the subject matter of the original bill in which they are inserted. Amendments or committee actions ruled not germane are disregarded and do not receive consideration by the House or Senate.

**Gerrymander** – To draw district boundary lines in a way that favors a particular candidate or political party or reduces the voting power of a minority group.

**House Bill (HB)** – A bill that is introduced by a State Representative and originates in the House.

**House Enrolled Act (HEA)** – A house bill that has passed both the House and Senate.

**Interim Study Committees** – Meeting during the months between sessions (interim), these committees study relevant issues and recommend legislation, if the committee members deem it necessary. The subjects often are suggested by legislators in the form of resolutions, but the committees are created by the Legislative Council.

**Legislative Services Agency (LSA)** – A non-partisan state agency whose duties include bill drafting, research, code revision, and fiscal, budgetary and management analysis. Employees of the LSA assist interim and standing committees, as well.

**OMPP** – Office of Medicaid Policy and Planning

**Originating Chamber** – The chamber, either the Senate or House of Representatives, in which a bill is first introduced.



**Resolution** – Generally used for congratulatory or honorary purposes, resolutions are introduced and voted upon by the Senate or House of Representative. Although they do not have the force of law when passed, resolutions also can suggest possible subjects for study in interim study committees or recommend future legislation. Most resolutions are considered symbolic and, when passed, denote the approval of the subject matter by the legislative body. Joint resolutions also can be introduced and considered by both the Senate and House of Representatives.

**Roll Call** – This refers to the voting procedure. Before electronic voting machines were installed in the House and Senate chambers, a clerk would read the roll call and the legislators would register their decisions by voice votes. Today, an electronic board lists the names of the legislators. Individual votes are registered when legislators select “aye” or “nay” votes via buttons on their desk.

**Second Reading** – After the bill has been printed, adding any amendments proposed by the standing committee, it is eligible for second reading. All legislators are allowed to offer amendments to the bill at this time.

**Second Regular Session or Short Session** – Occurring in even-numbered years, the second regular session (“short session”) can extend for up to 30 working (session) days, but not beyond March 15.

**Senate Bill (SB)** – A bill that is introduced by a State Senator and originates in the Senate.

**Senate Enrolled Act (SEA)** – A senate bill that has passed both the Senate and House.

**Session Day** – A session day constitutes a working day for the Indiana Senate and House of Representatives. Not necessarily consecutive calendar days, legislators may recess for varying periods of time between working days. It should also be noted that, under certain circumstances, a session day may span more than one calendar day.

**Special Session** – A special session may be called by the governor if he or she feels “the public welfare shall require” such a meeting of the legislature. A special session is limited to 30 session days during a period of 40 calendar days.

**Standing Committees** – These committees consider bills after they have been introduced. The Committees, which exists in both houses of the legislature, cover specific fields of interest such as agriculture, education, labor, public health and the judiciary. Committee meetings are open to the public so interested citizens and affected organizations can offer arguments for or against proposed legislation.

**Stripping a Bill** – Occasionally, the original contents of a bill are taken out and replaced with new language. This can be done in committee or by amendments. This



procedure is only allowed, however if the new contents are relevant to the original subject matter of the bill.

**Third House Meeting** – A public meeting that takes place in a Legislator’s District. General on Saturday or Monday mornings during the months the Indiana General Assembly is in session.

**Third Reading** – This refers to the point at which a bill undergoes final passage or rejection by a roll call vote of the members of the House or Senate. A floor debate to discuss the merits of the legislation generally precedes the final vote.

**Veto** – After a bill has been passed by both houses in the same form, it is eligible to the governor to be signed into law. If the Governor rejects the bill, he issues a veto. A veto bill can be overridden by a constitutional majority (two-thirds) in both houses.

## Sample Letters

(Date)  
The Honorable (member’s name)  
State House  
200 West Washington Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Senator/Representative (member’s last name):

I am writing in support (or opposition) of bill number SB/HB ### which will be heard on the Senate/House floor in the upcoming day/week.

The bill will have the following effect in the community. (Expand on the issue. Tell your personal story. How will you benefit/get hurt by the legislation?)

Thank you for taking time to review my concerns on this piece of legislation. After this bill comes up for a vote, I would appreciate being informed as to how you voted and why.

I am available to answer questions or provide testimony on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Your name  
Address  
Phone Number



## Letter from Family Member

[Today's Date]

[Your Name  
Address  
City, State, ZIP]

The Honorable [Representative or Senator Name]  
Address  
Office  
Indianapolis, IN, ZIP]

Dear [Representative or Senator Last Name]

I am writing you today as the parent of a [son/daughter] who has [specify the type of developmental disability]. As you may know, Medicaid funding provides individuals with disabilities the opportunity to receive community based, non-institutional supports in order that they can continue to live at home with their families or move into supported living arrangements within the community. Without these supports, these individuals could be forced into nursing homes and other more expensive living options. This program is funded through a mix of federal and state funds. It is a lifeline for families with children and adults with disabilities who need ongoing supports for health and safety as well as improved quality of life.

**My (son/daughter) [each letter writer should put their own story in this paragraph. Include information about the kinds of services your son/daughter is receiving (for example: they live in a group home, or a supported living home, or they still live at home with you, but go to services during the day) Also, indicate they type of supports he/she needs (for example: Jenny needs total care including with eating, bathing, or moving from place to place or Mark needs assistance with getting a job and then getting to and from that job) If your son/daughter has experienced staff turnover, speak about the impact this has had on him/her (for example: She receives supports by a local provider, but the turnover of staff leaves me worried about the quality of care she receives or he comes to really know and trust the staff that work with him, then they leave and we have to start all over).**

I am writing on behalf of myself and many other individuals who are receiving or waiting to receive services through Medicaid funding. These services provide basic, stable supports that would enable each of us; disabled individuals and caregivers alike, to more adequately support ourselves and our families, while contributing more fully to our communities. I invite you to come visit my family and have the opportunity to meet my son/daughter with special needs and to better understand... ( **examples of what you want them to know about your son/daughters supports -- how additional support could help him/her to be more successful within her community or how better paid direct support staff would provide more stability in his/her life).**



I hope you, as a legislator, are remaining informed of the efforts being taken by FSSA and others to adequately fund essential Medicaid services and that you support increased funding for these services. The system is becoming less and less stable as providers struggle with the long term impact of ongoing funding cuts. A stable support system for families and service providers significantly improves the quality of life for people with developmental disabilities like, **(your son/daughter's name)**, while increasing each person's opportunities to become much more productive members of our society. And that would help everyone.

Sincerely yours,

**[Sign here]**

**[Your first and last name]**

## **Letter from Self-Advocate**

**[Today's Date]**

**[Your Name  
Address  
City, State, ZIP]**

The Honorable **[Representative or Senator Name]**  
**Address  
Office  
Indianapolis, IN, ZIP]**

Dear **[Representative or Senator] Last Name:**

I am writing today, because I live in your district, and I'm a voter. I know that as a part of your job as an Indiana legislator, you have to decide how to spend the state's money, and you need ideas from your voters. I'm a person with a disability, and though you might not always hear very much from people like me, I want you to know we have a voice and we need your help.

First, let me tell you a little bit about where I live and what I do. **[Fill in information here about where you live (for example: group home, supported living apartment, with your family) and who you live with. Then tell the legislator a little bit about what you do (for example: work, arts programs, bowling, music, shopping) Then explain who helps you do those things and how they help you. (For example: My staff worker at (your provider's name) helps us cook our dinner, and we all help do the cleaning. They give me my medicine, help me with my banking, and do the grocery shopping. And when I go to art class or to work, my (your provider's name) staff person helps me get ready and drives me where I need to go.)]**



I'm concerned because a lot of people need direct support professionals (DSPs) like the ones I work with at **(your provider's name)**, but there aren't enough of them. Part of the problem seems to be that DSPs don't get paid very much. The money they get paid with comes from Medicaid and providers like **(your provider's name)** have had state budget cuts. I'm worried that my provider may need to cut some of our services. If that happens, I may have fewer choices about what I can do and where I can live.

You can help us when you vote for the budget this year. Please make sure that people with disabilities don't lose tax dollars that go to support disability programs, services and supports.

Thank you for your help and for your service.

Sincerely,

**[Sign here.]**

**[Your first and last name]**

## Letter from Direct Support Professional

**[Today's Date]**

**[Your Name  
Address  
City, State, ZIP]**

The Honorable **[Representative or Senator Name]**  
**Address  
Office  
Indianapolis, IN, ZIP]**

Dear **[Representative or Senator] Last Name:**

I am writing today, because I live in your district, and I'm a voter. I've been learning more about your job as a legislator and want to make sure you hear from people like me that work and try to make a living in **(your home community)** I know that as a part of your job as an Indiana legislator, you have to decide how to spend the state's money, and you need ideas from your voters. I have a job as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) with **(agency name)**. It's a job that I love, but I have to ask myself sometimes if I can continue to do this work and meet my **(my family's)** financial needs.

In my work as a DSP I **[Fill in information here about what you do in your job (for example: you work in a group home, supported living apartment, employment program, or lifelong learning program that supports people with disabilities). Then tell the legislator a little bit about what you do (For example: I provide personal care, I administer medicines and**



monitor the client's health. I help the individual find meaningful employment. I help the client manage their money and do their shopping etc.)My job requires that I work nights and week-ends and due to staff shortages at my employer, I'm often working many extra hours so the client's needs can be met. ]

I'm concerned because there aren't enough DSPs in my organization to do all of the work. Clients are not always getting the services they need. Part of the problem seems to be that DSPs don't get paid very much. The money we get paid with comes from Medicaid and providers like **(your provider's name)** have had state budget cuts. I'm worried that my because employers like **(your employer)** cannot pay DSPs and other staff more, that many staff will leave and new job seekers may not choose this profession. If this happens, I am really worried about the clients I serve being healthy and safe in the future.

I hope when you vote for the state budget in 2015 you will make sure that funding will support a quality workforce to meet the needs of people with developmental disabilities.

Thank you for your help and for your service.

Sincerely,

[Sign here.]

[Your first and last name]



**For more information and opportunities to advocate, visit our website at [www.stonebelt.org](http://www.stonebelt.org).**