

Guest Commentary

Democracy is not a one-way street. Unhappy? Start talking about it.



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Michele Corey



Guest Commentary



the Center for Michigan

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The Center for Michigan released its most recent [community conversation report](#) this week, which evidenced some pretty extreme distrust of the public sector and public systems intended to work for the people of Michigan.



Michele Corey is vice president for programs for Michigan's Children, a public-policy advocacy group.

Of course, this result is heightened, and should be, by the tragedy in Flint, where there was such a horrendous failure of local, state and federal public systems that thousands of people were poisoned – the ramifications of which we will not truly know for years to come. And, we just lived through the kind of election season that I hope we never do again, with hateful, divisive rhetoric intended to divide the nation on economic, gender, racial and geographic lines.

Fortunately, the report also highlighted a need to help fix what we believe is wrong. Well, that's the crux of it. We live in a democracy, a democracy where people are elected (or not), where laws are made and changed based on the will of the people. This democracy is our privilege and our (you've all heard me say it before) responsibility. We don't have the luxury to just sit back, our system requires participation. All policy makers, including those we like or dislike, trust or don't

trust, decide things based on what they have heard, from their friends, from their constituents, from the people who take the time to talk to them about the things that concern them – not just once, but many times.

Yes, investments made with our hard earned tax dollars are not always made in the best interest of children, youth and families. That is true at the federal, state, county and municipal level. And our system requires that we do something about that.

Almost every elected official offers consistent opportunities to talk with them publicly, or via phone, email, snail mail, social media, etc. If you sign up for your elected officials' electronic newsletters, you will get notice of their coffee hours – those times when they are at a local business or church, or somewhere else in their district just waiting to hear from their constituents. If the people we elect don't know what we know and what we think they should do differently, how can we really blame them for decisions that we disagree with? How can we not trust them if we haven't even talked with them?

We all need to make sure that we have done all that we can to make sure that our elected officials are well-informed, understand that their constituents are paying attention to what they are doing and that those same constituents are going to hold them accountable for those actions: in the media (read: letters to the editor); at the ballot box (read: attend candidate forums and vote); and elsewhere. Now is the time, when we feel the most frustrated about it, to act.

I know you have jobs, you have kids, you have lives. Still, take time to talk with your elected officials. Michigan's Children can help. We can work with you to bring policymakers, youth and families together; we can help you with contact information and talking points.

We can all agree that our elected officials need help – they need help to earn back our trust, and they need help to make the kinds of decisions that we can be proud of. Let's commit to helping them, and making things better for children, youth and families in Michigan.

ADD THE FIRST COMMENT

