

# **Fighting for Kids Through Advocacy**

## What You Need To Know to Influence Public Policy on Behalf of Children and Families

Bobby Dorigo Jones

March 14, 2018



*Public policy  
in the best interest  
of children.*

# Who We Are

- Michigan's Children is a statewide, independent voice for children and their families. We work with lawmakers, business leaders, and communities to make Michigan a place where all children have the opportunity to thrive.
- We strive to be a trusted, nonpartisan voice working to reduce disparities in child outcomes from cradle to career through public policy change.

# Policy In Context

- **Minimal movement in child and family outcomes, which is impacted by many factors including:**
  - Rising child and family poverty
  - Growing abuse and neglect
  - Minimal movement in child health outcomes
  - Declining educational outcomes

# Why the Disconnect?

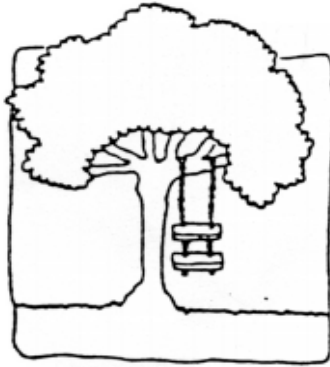
- Lots of competition for fewer dollars
  - Recent revenue bright spots resulting in challenge and opportunity
- Ideology about the role of government
  - Polarization of the parties
- Policymakers don't hear about issues of concern

# You Can Raise Your Voice For Your Cause!

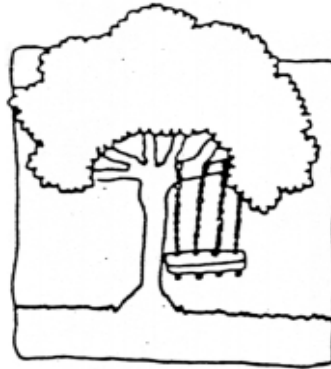
# Why Get Involved/Why Advocacy

- You Can
  - You already have the skills you need
  - It doesn't take that many of us
- You Should
  - There are things we want changed
  - Democracy=Responsibility
  - Decision-makers REALLY need our help

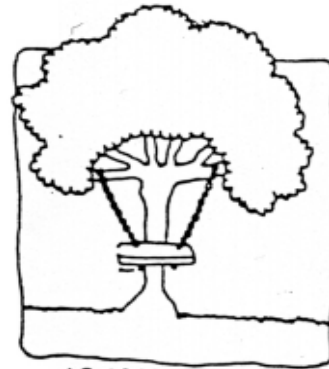
# How a Bill Becomes Law



AS INTRODUCED



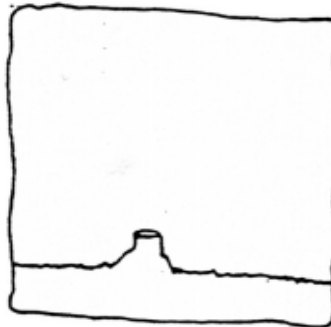
AS AMENDED IN  
COMMITTEE



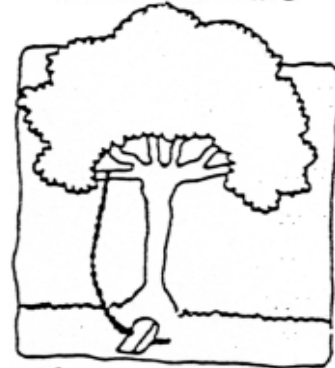
AS AMENDED ON  
SECOND READING



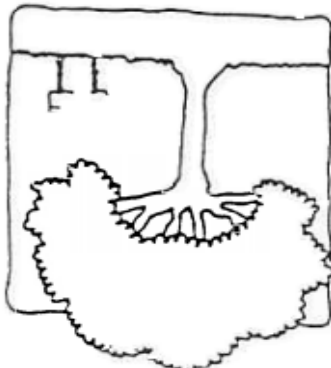
AS ENACTED



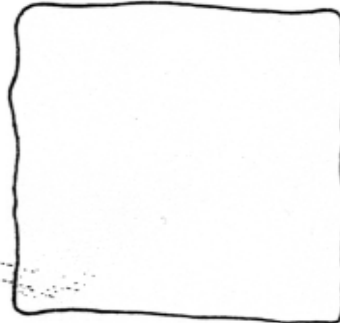
AS FUNDED BY JOINT  
BUDGET COMMITTEE



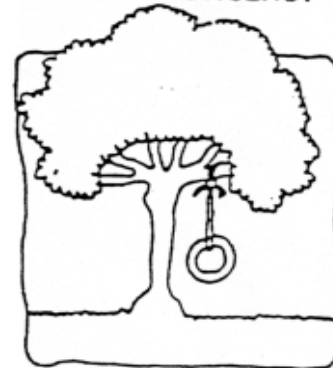
AS IMPLEMENTED BY  
THE STATE AGENCY



AS REPORTED BY THE  
MEDIA



AS UNDERSTOOD BY  
THE PUBLIC



WHAT WAS ACTUALLY  
NEEDED

# How do we make change?

- **Get the attention of the people who can make the change you want**
- **Talk to Decision-Makers**
  - A concern that you have about your life
  - A concern that you have about their work
- **Talk to Other People**
  - About an issue
  - About policymaker's views or positions
  - About how to act



# What Advocates Need to Know?

# What Advocates Need to Know?

- WHAT we are talking about – the issues
- WHO can give us what we want – the players
- WHEN to target them – the process
- HOW to get them to listen – the message

# Know the Issues

[www.michiganschildren.org](http://www.michiganschildren.org)



*Public policy  
in the best interest  
of children.*

# Know the Issues

- We Know the Issues
- We Are Experts in Life and Work
- Solution as important as the problem

# Know the Players

# Know the Players

- Who can make the change
- What influences them
- Who do we know? Who do we need?

# Audience Question: What Influences You?

# Who/What Influences Decision Makers

- Friends
- Title or position
- Information
- Numbers
- Constituents
- Money



“When you need a friend, it’s too late to make one.”

Mark Twain

# Who Do We Know?

- Relationships
- Information Partners
  - Researchers, Evaluators
- Titled Partners
  - Experts, Professionals
- Constituent Partners
  - Based on Geography and Experience

# Know the Message

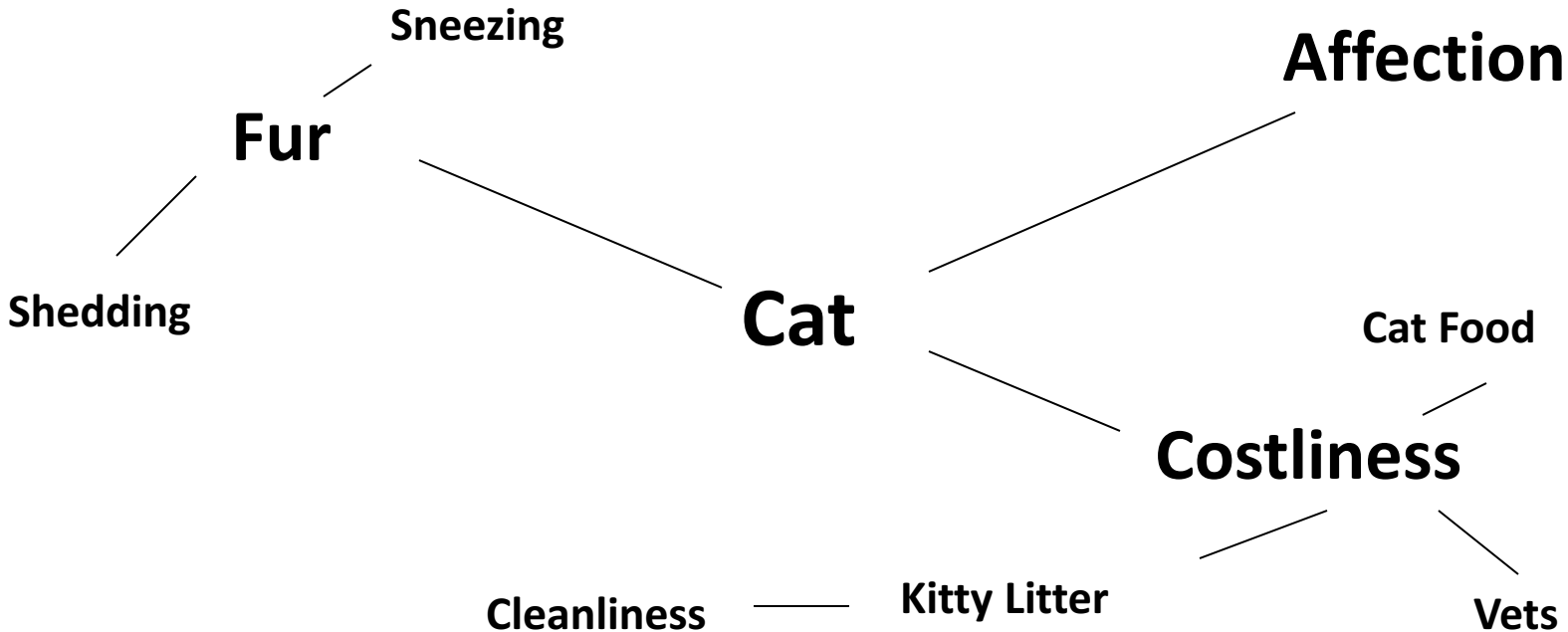
# Know the Message

- We use mental shortcuts to make sense of the world
- We make sense of things based on our life experiences, including the media
- We use “frames” to filter new information

**What do you think of when you hear...**

**Cat**

# Frames



# Why Do Frames Matter?

When the facts don't fit the frame, it is the FACTS that are rejected, not the frame.

# How To Find Their Frame

- **Get to Know Them!**
- Simple Research
- Paying Attention
- TALK TO THEM



# Know the Process

[www.michiganschildren.org](http://www.michiganschildren.org)



*Public policy  
in the best interest  
of children.*

# The Legislative Process

- Bills are introduced
- They are discussed by each chamber
  - Majority party controls the agenda
  - Both must agree
- They are presented to the Governor
  - Veto power

# Where do citizens fit in?

- Generate an idea
- Talk to committee members
- Make sure your elected officials support it
- Convince the administration to support it
- Bring issues to public attention

# Where do citizens fit in?

- Four tools for communication

- Letters/e-mails – 1 page

- Phone calls – 3 minutes

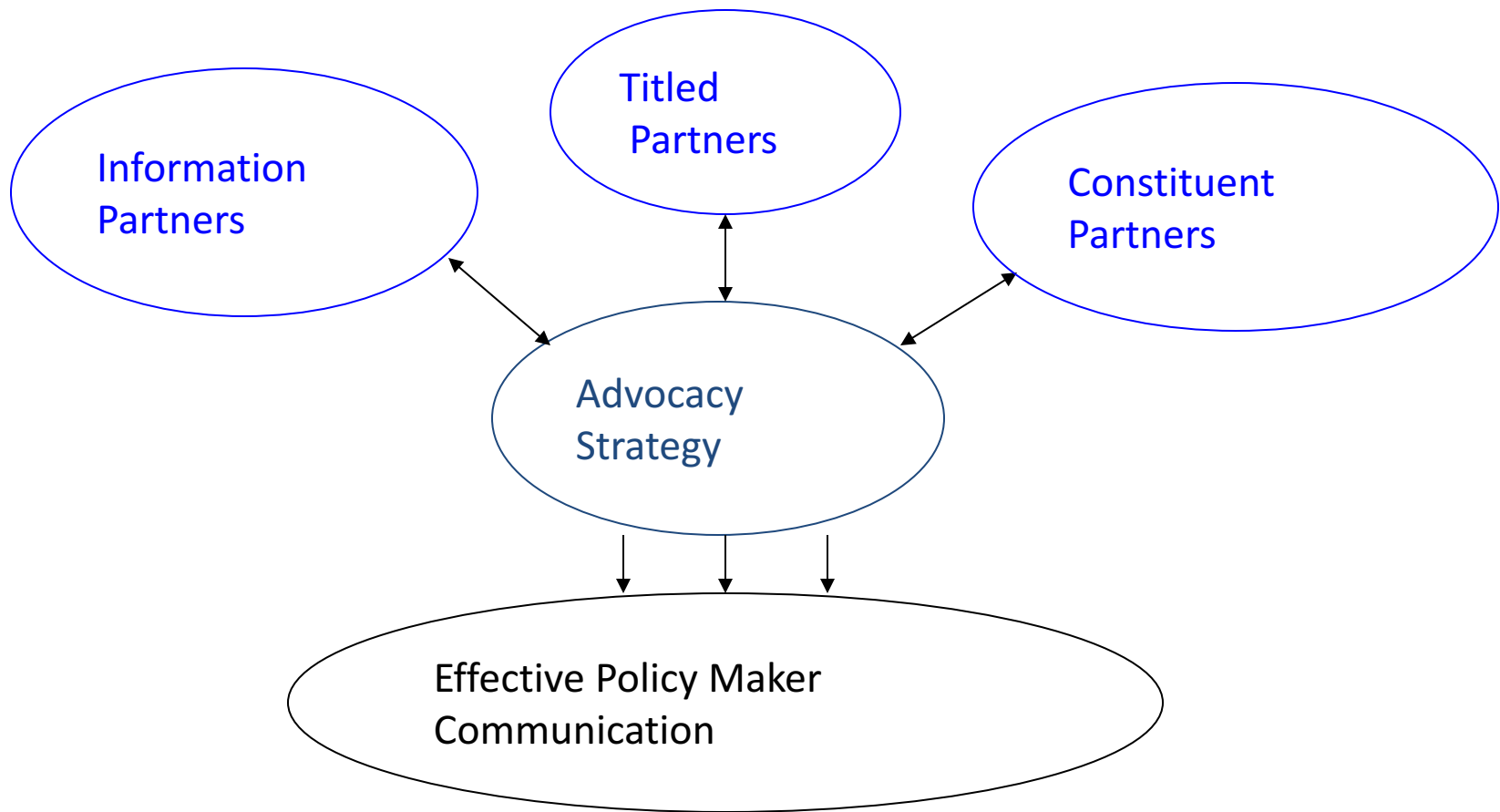
- Visits – 10-20 minutes

THEY CAN AND SHOULD VISIT YOU TOO!

- Testimony – 3-5 minutes

- Be brief and focused, but be sure they hear you

# Successful Advocacy



# Always Keep the Door Open

- If they don't do what you want...
  - What else do they need to know?
  - Express disappointment, but look for other possibilities
- If all else fails...
  - It's ok to be angry, channel it, organize
  - Get a better person elected/appointed/hired

# Let's Try It Out!

- Get together in small groups
- What's your issue? What do you want one of your elected officials to act on?
- Who's your legislator?
- What's their frame? What issues have they shown interest in?

# Let's Try It Out!

- Once you know your issue, your legislator, and their frame...
- Who influences your legislator?
  - Events?
  - Campaign donors?
  - Other concerned constituents?
- What's the strategy?



# Advocating for Kids in 2018

# Influencing the State Budget

# Fiscal Year 2019 Process

- May 2017 – December 2017: State Departments Submitted Recommendations
- February 2018: Governor's Budget Recommendations
- February – June 2018: Legislative Committees
- May 2018: Final Revenue Estimating Conference
- June 2018: Final Budget Signed by Governor

# Opportunities in FY2019

- Learning from previous budget cycles
  - ROI research
  - Focused advocacy efforts
  - Legislative legacies
  - Governor's leadership
- Federal News - CCDBG
- Opioid crisis and substance use
- Sexual Assault
- School Safety

# What To Do Now

- Sign-up for your legislators' emails.
- Begin building a relationship with candidates and elected officials.
- Educate candidates and policymakers about the needs of families with young children
- If your legislators sit on key committees – appropriations or education policy – get to know what they are about and find ways to tie the programs important to your family and your community to the things that they care about. Anticipate that you'll have more than one communication with him/her over the next few months.
- Stay connected to advocacy partners - Michigan's Children!

# Michigan's Children

- EBulletin
- Issues, Budget, and Election-related resources
- Facebook and Twitter
- Events – KidSpeak and FamilySpeak forums

Michigan's  
Children

*Public policy in the best interest of children*

Bobby Dorigo Jones  
Policy and Outreach Associate  
215 S. Washington Square  
Suite 110  
Lansing, MI 48933  
517.648.5072  
robert@michiganschildren.org  
www.michiganschildren.org