Who We Are

• A statewide, independent policy voice for children, youth and their families.
• We want Michigan’s public policy and programs to help children, youth and families access the opportunities they need to succeed.
• To make that happen, we work to ensure that policymakers prioritize the needs of children, youth and families facing the most challenges.
• We believe that better public policy is built when those directly impacted by it are engaged with decision makers.

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How We Work:
Knowing What Changes Public Policy

- **Understanding** Issues and Solutions
- Strategically **Communicating** that Information
- **Mobilizing Strategic Partners** and Engaging Communities Around Problems and Solutions
- **Advocate Directly** With Change Makers and Connect Others To Them
Michigan Situation

• Good News! Everybody loves kids
• Good News! Good News! People are concerned about suicide
• Good News! We know what to do
• Bad News! Sometimes they don’t love ALL kids – particularly all youth
• Bad News! Disinvestment trend
• Bad News! Limited political will to change the situation

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Policy In Context

- Growing child, youth and family poverty
- High unemployment for young adults, particularly those facing challenges like mental health, others
- Growing abuse and neglect
- Minimal movement in education outcomes
- Minimal movement in health outcomes
- Some public programs growing to meet needs, others not
- Over-reliance on federal support/support more tenuous
- Over-reliance on grants and pilot programs
- Reactions to crises of the moment
- Disinvestment in key areas like mental health
- Poor outcomes across the board for kids involved with the foster care and juvenile justice systems
Why the Disconnect?

• Lots of competition for fewer dollars
  – Deficit budget for more than a decade
  – Recent revenue bright spots resulting in challenge and opportunity

• Ideology about the role of government
  – Polarization of the parties
  – Unprecedented at this moment

• Policymakers don’t hear about issues of concern
Becoming a Voice For Your Cause

• Moving concerns into ACTION
• Using influence for CHANGE
• Changing Attitudes and Behavior
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 and work
  – 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
Building an Advocacy Strategy:
Becoming a Stronger Voice for Your Concerns

• WHAT are the changes that matter
• Getting the attention of the people who can make the changes that we want
  – WHO can make those changes
  – HOW to get them to listen – what influences them
• Who and What Do We Know
• Who and What Do We Need
Policymakers Need To Know What We Know

• We Know the Problems
• We Know What Works
• We Know What Doesn’t Work
• We And Those We Serve Are Experts in Life and Work
• Solution as important as the problem
What Are the Changes That Matter?

• What do policymakers need to know about children, youth and families?
  – How can we get that information

• What do policymakers need to know about how programs work or don’t work?
  – Maybe they work for some people but not others
  – Maybe they used to work but don’t anymore
  – Maybe they are based on the wrong information about what matters
How Do We Best Get Them That Information?

• Helps to Know Something About Them
  – What issues do they prioritize?
  – Who do they tend to listen to?
  – What do they think about our issues?
  – How does our work help to solve their problems?

• Helps to Know Something About Their Job
  – They are busy, have lots of issues to weigh in on
  – Helps to connect the dots between our issues and issues they are already talking about
You Can Do Some Homework on Their Priorities

• Who represents you? Who else do they represent?

• What have they said when they are in the district? Through media and otherwise?

• What have they worked on in Lansing?
  – They sponsor and co-sponsor bills
  – They all have committee assignments
Advocacy=
Bringing Influence to Bear

How Do We Influence Decision Makers?
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 Need?

- People Who Know
- Relationships
- Information Partners
  - Researchers, Evaluators
- Titled Partners
  - Experts, Professionals
- Constituent Partners
  - Based on Geography and Experience
How Do We Get Them to Listen?

• We use mental shortcuts to make sense of the world
• Based on our life experiences, including the media
• We use “frames” to filter new information
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
Current Policy Frames

• Flint Water Disaster/Distrust of Government
• Nassar Crimes/Reaction to Sexual Abuse
• School Shooting/Reaction to Safety
  – Gun Laws
  – School-Based Solutions
  – Mental Health
• Governing Into An Election Year
Four Critical Numbers

• 2500: Different piece of legislation to be considered EACH YEAR
• 10-20%: Voters who contact elected officials
• 12: Phone calls needed to get attention
• 5-20: Enough to start or stop a discussion
Civics 101

• The Clock is Always Ticking
• Always Looking for a Majority
• Two-party System – Majority in Power
• Bi-Cameral Legislature
• The Governor
How a Bill Becomes a Law

• Bills are introduced
• They are discussed by each chamber
  – Majority party controls the agenda
  – If both agree
• They are presented to the Governor
  – Veto power
The state budget, as the single most powerful expression of the state’s priorities, is a powerful tool for improving the circumstances of the most vulnerable, doing nothing for those circumstances, or making those circumstances worse.
Democracy in Action

• Four tools for communication
  – Letters/e-mails – 1 page
  – Phone calls – 3 minutes
  – Coffee Hours – depends
  – Office 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
Opportunities in 2018 and Beyond

• Attention to Behavioral Health
  – Legislative Caucuses
    • Disabilities Caucus
    • CARES Task Force
  – Mental Health Commission Charge
  – Federal Health Care Conversation
  – School Safety Crisis
  – Opioid Crisis

• Attention to Trauma Informed Practice

• Other opportunities?

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The Elections

• Get to know the candidates
• Educate the candidates on the issues that matter to you.
• Help groups you are involved with understand the candidates’ positions. Better yet, invite candidates to those meetings.
• Vote
• Stay engaged after the elections are over.

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Capitalizing on the Election Year

• More Attention on Issues
• More Attention to Constituents
• More Opportunities to Connect
• Building Early Relationships for Next Year
Giving Our Solutions The Best Chance

• What do we need to do before talking with policymakers?
• Who would be good partners to engage?
• Who might be the best messengers?
Always Keep the Door Open

• If they don’t do what you want...
  – Can you blame them? Did they know what you know?
  – Express disappointment, but look for other possibilities

• If all else fails...
  – Don’t get angry
  – Get a better person elected/appointed/hired
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