

Topics for Advocacy Guide:

STATE:

1. How to determine who your state representatives are
 1. wheredoivotema.com
 2. Ballotpedia: https://ballotpedia.org/Massachusetts_General_Court
 3. <https://malegislature.gov/>
2. The importance of districts:
 1. House Districts are smaller. Larger cities/towns may have multiple reps, smaller ones will have one, or may share a rep with other towns. District boundaries often cross municipal lines
 2. Senate districts are larger. Most cities/towns will share a Senator with other neighboring cities/towns
 3. Members are accountable to those who live in their districts.
3. Why should disability commissions be involved in advocacy?
 1. Local Standing: Reps and Senators care deeply about their own districts. Disability commissions represent people with disabilities in specific cities/towns. An individual can meet with their own Rep and Senator; a member of a disability commission can meet with **every** Rep. and Senator from their town.
 2. Boots on the ground: You see the granular issues that larger organizations may miss. DPC can talk about businesses denying people work because the ADA bill hasn't passed, but it's a lot stronger if you can say "this specific new supermarket in our town is inaccessible for employees" for example.
 3. Legislative decisions directly affect your commission. Sometimes they literally pass regulations on disability commissions (e.g. open meeting law changes). But they're passing legislation every single day that affects people with disabilities at a local level. You owe it to your constituency to be involved.
 4. Promotes involvement. People get excited by the chance to make change. If your commission can show the people in your city/town that you're advocating for their needs, it will encourage them to get involved, work hard, and take on leadership roles.
 5. Creates connections. This group is an example of the gains that come from disability commissions working together, and statewide advocacy campaigns are excellent ways to do that. Furthermore, this also builds the connection between you and your reps, which is a strong asset for a commission to have.
4. How to keep track of what's going on?
 1. malegislature.gov. Search bills for words like "disability," "accessibility," "mental health," etc.
 1. **See who the cosponsors are**
 2. DPC Newsletter
 3. Local IL's newspaper and website
 4. MACOD
5. How to advocate
 1. Letters to reps. Write your own or sign on to existing ones.
 1. Include sample letter
 2. Meet with your reps
 1. How to schedule a meeting.
 2. How to conduct yourself in the meeting
 1. Be prompt
 2. Bring fact sheets
 3. Have a personal story prepared

4. Have an elevator pitch
5. Answer questions honestly
6. Follow up
7. Getting help if you need it (From DPC, IL's, etc.)
3. How to testify at a hearing.
 1. Tracking where and when hearings are held
 2. Signing up and being heard
 3. Have a plan for what you're doing to say.
 4. Use both stories and facts.
 5. Present legislation as either a cause of a problem or a solution to a problem
 6. Practice, practice, practice
 7. BE CONCISE
 8. Bringing evidence (charts and graphs)
 9. How to submit written testimony
4. Rallying your community
 1. Spread the word online or in person
 2. Hold a forum or rally
 3. Petitions
5. Build connections with other CODs
 1. MACOD group
 2. Identifying regional issues
 3. Finding other commissions in your area
 4. Holding joint meetings & creating a working group.
6. Coalition Building
 1. Identifying other organizations you could collaborate with on an issue
 2. How to reach out to another organization
 3. Setting up ongoing meetings
 4. Planning joint strategy

LOCAL:

1. Where are local decisions made?
 1. City Council/Board of Aldermen/Board of Selectmen
 2. Town Meeting (in towns)
 3. Mayor or City Manager
 4. Municipal Boards
 1. Zoning and planning boards
 2. School Board or School Committee
 3. Other citizen committees like yours
 5. Municipal Departments
 1. Engineering
 2. Traffic and Parking
 3. Public Works
 4. Police and Emergency Services
 5. School Department
2. Role and restrictions for disability commissions in local advocacy
 1. Understanding statutory restrictions: what are you allowed to say?
 2. Commission advocating collectively vs. members advocating individually
 1. Beware the open meeting law.
 3. Public vs. private advocacy, and advising vs. arguing
3. What you can bring to the table

1. Direct contact with city services.
 2. User expertise in accessibility
 1. Put Boston Letter testimony here?
 3. Connecting citizens with disabilities to city government
 4. Knowledge of disability law and policy
 1. Don't assume that because someone is a city employee or an elected official that they know the law or about policy issues
4. How to advocate
1. Developing relationships with municipal elected officials
 1. How and when to schedule a meeting.
 1. Know the budget schedule.
 2. Right before an election may be a bad time. Right after an election may be an opportunity.
 2. They want to hear your concerns
 3. Make yourself a resource
 1. Supporting members who already agree with you with talking points
 4. Ask about their upcoming projects
 2. Getting to know department staff
 1. How to schedule a meeting.
 2. Tell them about your concerns
 3. Ask if projects they're pursuing have taken disability into account
 1. Housing as a key area of concern.
 4. Make yourself a resource.
 5. Get to know midlevel staff, not just department heads
 6. Use all your connections
 3. Councils and boards
 1. Read agendas for upcoming board meetings
 2. Ask members you have relationships with to notify you when something disability related comes up.
 3. Think about how disability might fit into major issues being discussed.
 4. How to speak in a public hearing
 1. Use the advice for testifying in legislative hearings above.
 2. How to identify yourself so as not to get your commission in trouble
 3. Emphasizing your unique perspective