

1. **Who Are Your Legislators?**

Go to <http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/Home.aspx> and type in your home address to find out who represents you. Click on whose name you’d like to contact, and you’ll find their address and phone number. You can also search their name at <https://www.texastribune.org/> to find their email addresses. For most issues, you’ll want to contact the people that represent you in Texas, like your Texas State Senator and Representative. However, if there’s an important national issue or bill that might get voted on soon, you’d want to contact your U.S. Senators or Congressperson. Check out The Arc of the U.S.’ Action Center to stay up-to-date on national issues at <http://cqrcengage.com/thearc/action?3> and The Arc of Texas’ Action center for Texas issues <https://www.thearcoftexas.org/action-center/> .

1. **What’s the Issue?**

Take some time to reflect on the issue you’re facing. Is it a lack of support or opportunities for employment? Is it waiting for a Medicaid waiver to receive community-based services? Is it a problem in the special education system? Be sure that it’s something that legislators have the power to fix through legislation. Practice clearly defining the issue you’re facing and ask yourself the following questions:

* How does this issue affect my life or the life of my loved one?
* Why is it so important?
* What is the solution?
* What are my hopes for the future?
1. **What Facts Support Your Story?**

Do some research to find information that supports your story. Just adding an important statistic or two can make your contact even more powerful. Some helpful resources that explore issues that people with IDD face are:

* <http://cfi.ucp.org/> - <http://www.stateofthestates.org/>
* <http://www.disabilitystatistics.org/> - <https://www.statedata.info/>
* <https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/> - <http://www.tcdd.texas.gov/>
* <https://hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/records-statistics/interest-list-reduction>
1. **What’s Your “Ask”?**

It’s very important that you’re clear in what you’re asking your legislators to do. Maybe it’s to vote “no” or “yes” on a certain bill, to author or sponsor a bill, to allocate more funding to a program, or just to advocate on behalf of your issue at the Capitol. The more specific, clear, and polite you are in seeking support, the more effective you will be.

1. **Making Contact**

There are a handful of ways you can get the attention of your legislators, including phone calls, letters, emails, meeting face-to-face, or providing a testimony in front of a legislative committee.

* **General tips:** Be sure to practice what you are going to say during a call, meeting, or testimony and have others proof-read your letters or emails. If you make a phone call or schedule a meeting, it is likely that the legislator will not be available, so be sure to ask to speak to a staff

As a person with an intellectual or developmental disability (IDD) or a family member, you probably have a story that legislators need to hear. It is so important that we collectively speak up for the needs and rights of people with IDD, so use this guide to help you share your story.

**Have something to say?***A Guide for Contacting Legislators*

member. Always identify yourself first and mention that you are a constituent. Clearly explain your issue; appeal to their values; include some facts; and make your “ask”. Always thank them for listening, and remember to keep it short and simple.

* **Timing:** The Texas Legislature meets every odd-numbered year. If the Legislature is in session, be sure to stay up-to-date on current bills that affect people with IDD so that you can contact your legislators about them. Monitor what’s happening at the Capitol through this website: <https://capitol.texas.gov/>. A great time to contact your legislators about issues unrelated to current bills is in-between sessions. This is when legislative offices are creating their priorities.
* **Make it unique:** Think of some ways to make your story stand out. A handwritten letter may be more memorable than an email, for example. Have the first sentence of your letter or testimony really grab their attention. There is great political power in numbers and consistency. The more people we have consistently contacting legislators about an issue, the more likely we’ll be heard. Share what you’re doing with friends and family, and ask that they contact their legislators, too.
* The Texas Council on Developmental Disabilities has some more great tips on these strategies here: <http://www.tcdd.texas.gov/public-policy/legislative-advocacy-tips/>

**Example letter**

The Honorable Jane Doe

Texas Senate

P.O. Box 12345, Capitol Station

Austin, TX 78711

Dear Senator Doe,

How would you feel if you got paid below minimum wage and sometimes for as little as 50 cents an hour? How would you feel if you worked in a segregated setting away from the rest of the community? What if you didn’t have any opportunities for career advancement? Unfortunately, that is the reality for nearly 10,000 Texans with disabilities who work in sheltered workshops.

My daughter is 28 and has an intellectual disability. She worked in a sheltered workshop for 5 years because there were no other work opportunities we could find for her. She was deemed “unemployable” by a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, and we couldn’t find anyone else who could support her in her job. Luckily, we befriended the owners of a local café, and they recently hired her on as a barista. She loves her job now and tells me that she likes her big paychecks, independence, and feeling more “normal”.

People with intellectual disabilities are employable, and they bring unique strengths to our workforce. They want to work just like you and I do. They just simply need the opportunity and right supports to be able to find and keep a job. An estimated 9% of Texans with intellectual disabilities have a paid job in an integrated, community setting. This number is upsetting, and it is much lower than the national estimate at 17%.

As your constituent, I ask that you work to change things for the better for Texans with intellectual disabilities. Please support legislation that will end discriminatory subminimum wage laws in sheltered workshops in Texas. Our state needs to prioritize funding for supported employment services that provide ongoing supports for people with intellectual disabilities to find and keep a job in the community. Please provide them with the opportunity to “pull up their bootstraps” and get to work. Thank you for standing up for Texans with intellectual disabilities.

Sincerely,

Janette Davis, 832-123-4567, jd@email.com

Questions? Please contact Joanna at joannal@aogh.org