

Advocating for change

You can advocate for change by talking to the media, building support within community and faith-based groups and, above all, writing or meeting with legislators and the governor's staff.

In contacting policymakers, there are some important points to remember.

- Explain who you are and what your connection to the issue is.
- If you are advocating for a particular prisoner, explain that person's situation briefly but completely. Putting an individual human face on the problem is very important.
 - Be honest. Emphasize the person's strong points but do not omit or misrepresent critical facts that will come back to destroy the credibility of your position.
 - Never minimize the harm done to victims.
- Be sure you understand the issues and all the arguments pro and con. Legislators do not know the details of every law on the books. You must educate them about your issue.
- Explain clearly what changes you want people to support and why these specific changes are important. People must understand what you are asking them to do.
- Do not ask legislators to fix problems that are outside their authority. For instance, legislators cannot reverse an individual conviction or change a person's sentence. Claims of innocence or of error in trial or sentencing procedures must be addressed by the courts.
- Write in clear, simple language. Make sure that handwritten letters are legible. Keep letters as short as possible. Keep enclosures down to those that are critical for explaining your position. People will not read mail they cannot decipher or that is so long it makes them feel overwhelmed. Have someone else read your letter and make editing suggestions.
- Always be polite. Do not attack parole board members or other MDOC personnel.
- Include your name and address and other contact information.
- Thank the legislator or staff member for meeting with you or reading your letter.

Similar rules apply when dealing with the media. Whoever you are trying to persuade, look at the issue from their point of view. Think about what information they need and what arguments are most likely to persuade them.

How to contact legislators

You can find the name of your elected lawmaker and all contact information by going to the internet.

To find your senator see: www.senate.michigan.gov and click on "Find Your Senator."

To find your representative see: www.house.michigan.gov/locaterep.asp.

Most public libraries have public access to the internet and can help you find the site you need. If you can't gain access, you can call 517-373-2400 for the Senate and 517-373-0135 for the House.

In addition to writing your own legislators, you might want to write to the chairpersons of key legislative committees.

The correct ways to address letters to legislators are as follows:

Representatives

The Honorable (full name)
State Representative
State Capitol
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Senators

The Honorable (full name)
State Senator
State Capitol
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

Dear Rep. (last name):

Dear Senator (last name):

To write to Gov. Rick Snyder, send the letter to:

Office of the Governor
Constituent Services Division
111 S. Capitol Ave.
Lansing, MI. 48933-1591

Please send a copy of your letter and a list of everyone to whom you sent it to:

CAPPS
403 Seymour Ave., Suite 200

Lansing, MI 48933

so that we can keep track of everyone's efforts.