

**Meeting Minutes**  
**Legislative Dinner**  
**August 16, 2007**  
**6-8:45pm**  
**Lincoln School, Room 2**

We were joined by Sharon Peters and Jean Doss from Michigan's Children. They offered guidance and information of advocacy as well as assisting with facilitation of the meeting.

1. Sharon began with introductions, asking those that participated in the Star Power Rally to share their thoughts about the day. (Kanayah Rabbitt, Dalonda Duffin, Chris Moss, and Sheri Butters attended)
2. Sharon made these points about advocacy:
  - There is something you can do about your issues
  - Advocacy is a basic part of citizenship
  - The point is not to complain, be positive!
  - Know your issues
  - Look at solutions
  - It is not someone else's job, it's everyone's job!
  - You have to vote if you want your voice heard!
  - Legislators need and want to know what is going on in your head
  - Your personal story (and knowing how to share it) is important
  - You don't need an army—a small, credible group is effective
  - Changes happen faster when the people closest to the issues speak out
  - When you need a friend it is too late to make one!
3. Sharon also shared that Michigan's Children offers a leadership training course called VOICES that consists of several sessions and focuses on leadership and advocacy.
4. Jean Doss, a lobbyist contracted by Michigan's Children was introduced and shared these points:
  - We spend billions of dollars on corrections, interventions, and higher education—the most expensive end, and don't invest enough in the front end (cheaper!)
  - It's important to share what is important to you
  - One reason people do not get involved is they feel confused by advocacy, remove the mystery.
5. We were joined by our Legislative guests: Representative Martin Griffin, Renell Weathers (Field Representative, Sen. Schauer), and Jill Larder (Field Representative, Congressman Tim Walberg) Kanayah Rabbitt greeted each guest and presented them with a packet of information about the Great Start initiative and ECIC.
6. Annette Anulewicz welcomed each guest and gave a brief description of our coalition. Jean Doss asked for each guest to share what is going on in their offices right now.

7. Representative Griffin shared that the house is in session about 2 days a week right now, and that a lot of the legislation being introduced is “garbage”. He also shared that a version of the MI business tax passed. He has received 500 emails a day some days from the American Cancer Society; most were not from his constituency. He shared that he serves on several committees: Commerce, Great Lakes and Environment, Capitol Committee, and the New Economy and Quality of Life Committees. Some points he shared:
  - Capitol Committee: Luncheons are being held in the halls at the capitol, encourages rodent problems, damages the building
  - Great Lakes and Environment: concerned about water usage, ethanol and beverage bottlers use a lot of water. How do we limit the amount of water being used without damaging our state’s commerce and economy?Representative Griffin also shared that efforts will most likely be made to recall anyone who supports a tax increase. He made mention of CAA and applauded Marsha Kreucher for all of her successes in Jackson County. He also shared that he is often called upon to read to the Head Start children and what a success the whole Head Start program is.
8. Renell Weathers, Field Representative from Senator Schauer’s office shared these points:
  - Legislation is being looked at to help in the fight against childhood obesity; she particularly mentioned a piece of legislation that would require 30 minutes a day, five days a week of physical activity for children.
9. Jill Larder, Field Representative from Congressman Tim Walberg’s office shared these points:
  - Congressman Walberg is currently in the District (Eaton County?) and is hosting several coffees/gatherings to meet with constituents.
  - Their office on the corner of Ganson and West Ave is staffed 9-5pm M-F and everyone should feel free to stop by with any comments and/or concerns.
  - She also shared the view that the community approach is the best way to support early childhood, not necessarily government involvement.
10. Jean Doss thanked each guest for sharing and asked their opinions on how we can be most effective in our advocacy efforts. These comments were made:
  - Form letters will most likely get form responses—unanimous
  - Snail mail gets more response than email—Rep. Griffin
  - Include you home address on everything—Rep. Griffin
  - Personalize your communication—Jill Larder
  - Keep it (the issue) in their face—Renell Weathers
  - Building relationships/networking is key—Rep. Griffin
  - A simple phone call or personal letter is most effective—Jill Larder
  - Rep. Griffin shared that the first thing he always asks when something is brought before him is how will you pay for it? Important to have solutions.
11. Jean Doss thanked each guest for their advice and asked for questions from the parent members in attendance. These questions and concerns were voiced:

- Alice Walker: Voiced concern about the release of so many prisoners from our prison in Jackson with the closure of the facility. Expressed concern about the safety and welfare of her children. Renell shared that the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Program is in place to ensure that prisoners who are released are closely monitored. Rep. Griffin shared that each year 4000-5000 prisoners are released; the closure of the prison is only an addition 500 or so. The media has spun the facts to make a story. Both Rep. Griffin and Renell shared that the prisoners that will be released are non-violent, and are within 1 year of being released anyway. Renell also shared the point that these prisoners will be released to the area that they came from. They will not be residing in Jackson unless they came from Jackson. Rep. Griffin reinforced this point. Chris Moss noted that he has seen prisoners that are newly released being escorted to the bus stop to be transported home.
- Sharon Peters made the comment that a lot of resources are being used at the rear end when we need the investment at the front end. (Prevention!!)
- Kanayah Rabbitt expressed concern about special needs services and quality of care for special needs children (respite). Both Representative Griffin and Renell Weathers noted her concerns and explained that they are unfamiliar with local efforts in this area. Annette Anulewicz offered advice and possible contacts. Jill Larder encouraged her to speak with someone at their office to see if they can be of any assistance.
- Jessica Embury shared that EHS is an awesome program and how her children have benefited. She also asked if any effort will ever be made to make that kind of program available to every child. She pointed out the very small number of children that can be served because of limited funding. Rep. Griffin pointed out that Head Start money comes from the federal level. Sharon Peters noted that there are several sources of funds in the state that are for 0-3 programs. Better use of that money?? Rep. Griffin responded by acknowledging the success of the Head Start model and mentioned a plan proposed by the Governor to support Pre-K with a \$194 million program. Matt Gillard is the Chair of the Education Committee.
- Jessica Embury also asked about the state of the budget. Are we any closer to resolving this problem? Will there be money at some point? Rep. Griffin mentioned again that a tax increase seems unlikely due to efforts already in place to start recalls for those who support it. He also shared that legislators are looking at several ways to increase revenue without raising taxes. Reforms, performance reviews of each department to gauge the effectiveness, etc...
- Kim shared that lunches at JATA cost a little more, but are healthier and that they, like most schools, have no PE class. They do support physical activity by having incentives for the students to walk. She also expressed concern about the expenditures for expansions and improvements to State and Hospital buildings. Rep. Griffin shared that hospitals are in most instances spending private dollars. Renell Weathers agreed.
- Annette Anulewicz asked for clarification on the Lottery system. How much actually goes to our schools? Rep. Griffin stated that the profit from the

lottery, although it seems like a huge amount, is only a drop in the bucket when it comes to the cost of education in the state. He encouraged everyone to research the costs.

12. Jean Doss thanked each guest for taking time out of their busy schedule to join us. Parent members were encouraged to continue building relationships with them. Legislative guests encouraged this also and thanked everyone for the opportunity to talk with them. This concluded the meeting with elected officials.
13. Jean Doss thanked everyone for their participation and encouraged everyone to view our interaction with elected officials as a partnership. Sheri Butters pointed out that each guest had specifically mentioned that form letters are not as effective as a personal approach.
14. Jean Doss then shared that term limits have been detrimental to the whole democratic process. Senators can serve 2—4yr terms; Representatives can serve 3—2yr terms. Sharon shared that in a very difficult job, these people are only just starting to really “get it” and then we start all over.
15. Jean shared some basic civics information with the group:
  - Senate 38 members, House 110 members
  - 2 numbers to remember: 20 and 56, number of votes to pass a piece of legislation. (20 in Senate, 56 in House)
  - Senate is in session 10am Tues, Wed, and Thursday
  - House is in session 1:30pm Tues and Wed, noon on Thurs.
  - Keep this in mind when setting up appointments
  - House Bills start at 4000, Senate Bills start at 1—helps to keep track of where it originated. Number will stay the same, but additions will be made depending on what version and where it has been.
  - Know your facts and figures—Legislators like facts and numbers to support issues, but personal stories are what gets things done. Tell the story of early childhood effectively
  - Don’t forget the Governor when you advocate. All legislation passes her desk and she does have veto power
  - Sometimes knowing when to shut up is very important, especially with someone who already supports what you are doing
  - Know how to frame your message
16. Sheri Butters thanked Sharon and Jean for coming and sharing information with us. Also applauded Michigan’s Children for the work they do on behalf of our children.

Meeting Adjourned