PPAL

Parent/Professional Advocacy League, Inc.

The Inside Track: Advocacy In Action

Pamela Bows, Policy Coordinator



Parent/Professional Advocacy League Training

11/17/2026

Housekeeping

PPAL
Parent/Professional Advocacy League



- Please introduce yourself in the chat – name and role (parent, family support) and where you're from



- Please keep yourself on mute - unless you are speaking - to reduce background noise



- Use the 'raise hand' or chat to let us know when you'd like to speak



- Please type questions into the chat box

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Agenda

- **Intro + PPAL Updates**
- ***Hear From:*** **Disability Law Center on Seclusion**
- **State Budget Advocacy - Overview**
- **State Legislative Advocacy - Overview + Advocacy Actions**
- **PPAL Family Advocacy Alliance**
-
- **Networking + Resource Sharing**

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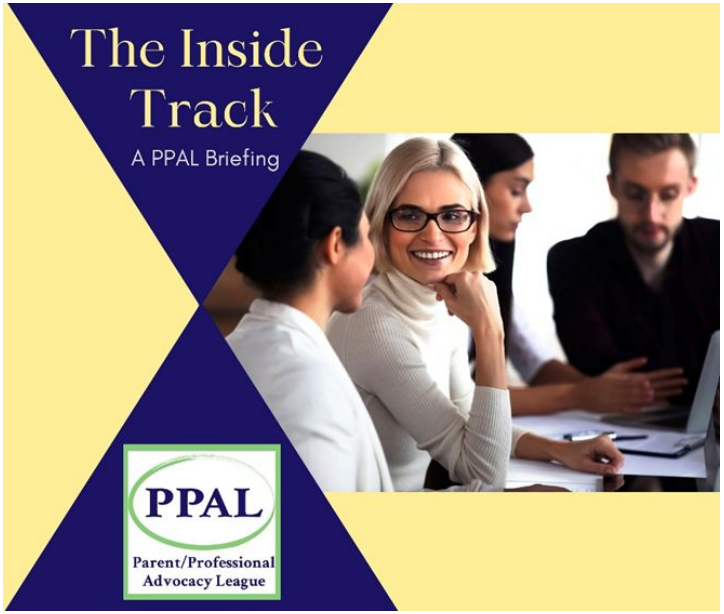
Welcome to the Inside Track

- Confidentiality
- Bi-monthly meeting focused on policy, updates and networking
- Knowledge is power– and impact
- PPAL believes that families should have access to all information that affects them, and be able to provide feedback
- You will get a link to the slides and resources within the week that we only share with participants. You can see the meetings prior to check in on policy changes and/or things coming!



Funded by the Klarman Family Foundation

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Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL)

A statewide, grassroots, family-run organization in Massachusetts.

PPAL's goal is to promote opportunities for families to become leaders and to ensure that the perspective of families is present in all conversations about children and youth.

Family organizations are an important strategy for boosting family participation, supporting and sustaining family voice (Lazear & Anderson, 2009)



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PPAL Parent Support Groups

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JOIN US!!!!

Are you navigating the mental or behavioral health systems for a child, teen, or young adult?

Request 1:1 peer support!

We have NO waitlist!

MONDAY

Virtual: **Grupo de Apoyo Hispano**
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Hybrid: **Parenting Young Adults - Looking to the Future**
5:00 PM - 6:30 PM
(Gardner)

TUESDAY

Hybrid: **Caregiver Connections**
5:00 PM - 6:30 PM
(Winchendon)

FREE Services. No insurance required.

WEDNESDAY

Virtual: **Relax & Connect**
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Virtual: **Caregiver Connections**
6:00 PM - 7:30 PM

THURSDAY

Virtual: **Grandparents Lunch and Learn**
2nd Thursdays
12:00 - 2:00 PM

4th Thursdays
6:30 - 8:00 PM

Virtual: **Empowered Caregiver Connections**
6:00 - 7:30 PM

FRIDAY

Virtual: **Parenting Power UP**
12:00 PM - 1:30 PM

In Person: **Family Support Group for Lynn Families**
2nd & 4th Fridays
6:30 - 8:30 PM

In-person Support Group coming soon to Worcester!

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MASS DMH
HOPE • EQUITY • SERVICE
Department of Mental Health

Do you need help navigating and advocating in the school system for a loved one with mental or behavioral health needs?

School Problem Solving Clinic
Make An Appointment!
PPALSchoolClinic@ppal.net

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Our Newsletter:

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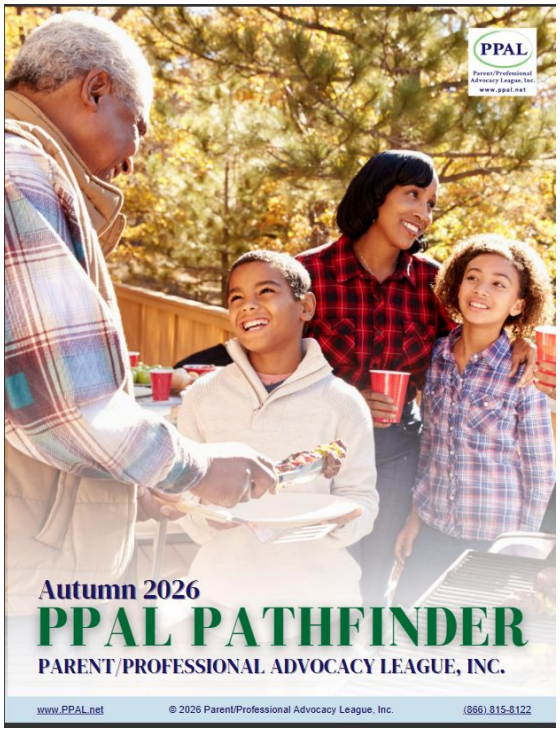
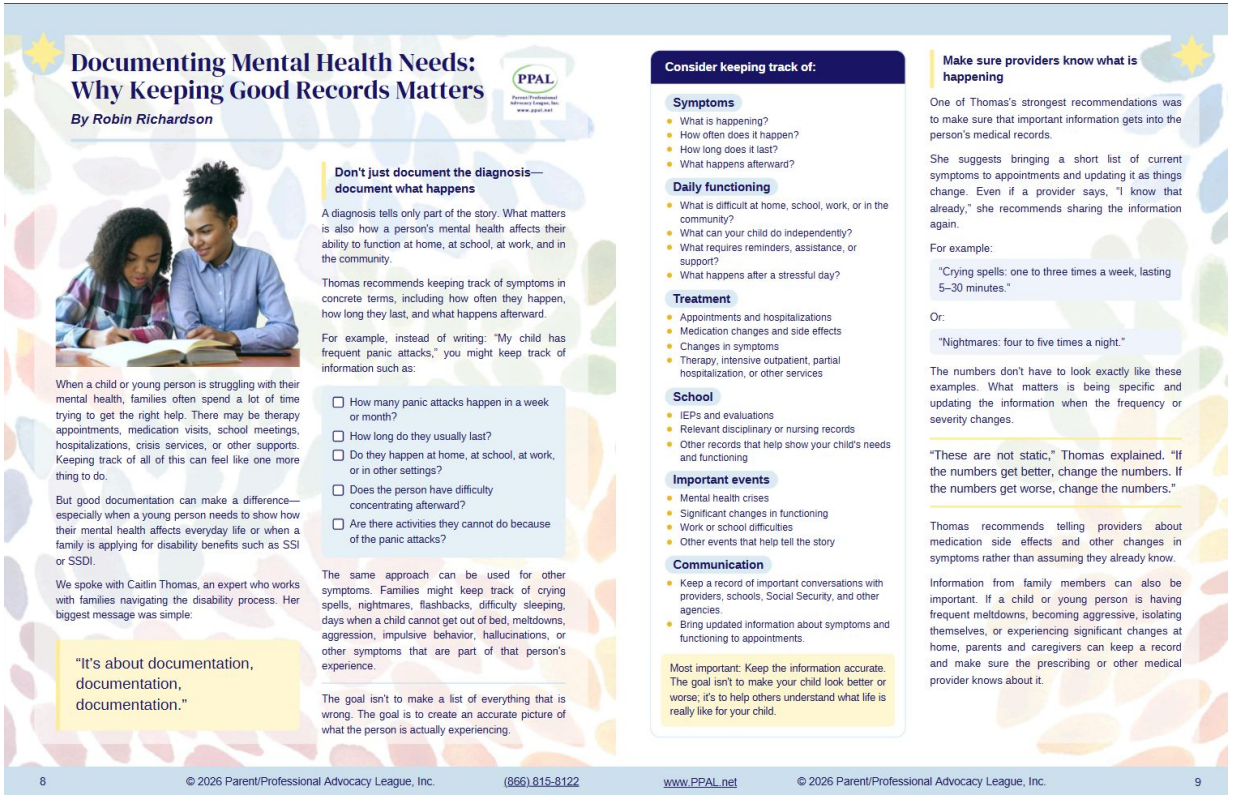


https://ppal.net/publication/autumn-2026-newsletter/



Documenting Mental Health Needs: Why Keeping Good Records Matters

By Robin Richardson

When a child or young person is struggling with their mental health, families often spend a lot of time trying to get the right help. There may be therapy appointments, medication visits, school meetings, hospitalizations, crisis services, or other supports. Keeping track of all of this can feel like one more thing to do.

But good documentation can make a difference—especially when a young person needs to show how their mental health affects everyday life or when a family is applying for disability benefits such as SSI or SSDI.

We spoke with Caitlin Thomas, an expert who works with families navigating the disability process. Her biggest message was simple:

> "It's about documentation, documentation, documentation."

Don't just document the diagnosis—document what happens

A diagnosis tells only part of the story. What matters is also how a person's mental health affects their ability to function at home, at school, at work, and in the community.

Thomas recommends keeping track of symptoms in concrete terms, including how often they happen, how long they last, and what happens afterward.

For example, instead of writing: "My child has frequent panic attacks," you might keep track of information such as:

- ☐ How many panic attacks happen in a week or month?
- ☐ How long do they usually last?
- ☐ Do they happen at home, at school, at work, or in other settings?
- ☐ Does the person have difficulty concentrating afterward?
- ☐ Are there activities they cannot do because of the panic attacks?

The same approach can be used for other symptoms. Families might keep track of crying spells, nightmares, flashbacks, difficulty sleeping, days when a child cannot get out of bed, meltdowns, aggression, impulsive behavior, hallucinations, or other symptoms that are part of that person's experience.

The goal isn't to make a list of everything that is wrong. The goal is to create an accurate picture of what the person is actually experiencing.

Consider keeping track of:

Symptoms
- What is happening?
- How often does it happen?
- How long does it last?
- What happens afterward?

Daily functioning
- What is difficult at home, school, work, or in the community?
- What can your child do independently?
- What requires reminders, assistance, or support?
- What happens after a stressful day?

Treatment
- Appointments and hospitalizations
- Medication changes and side effects
- Changes in symptoms
- Therapy, intensive outpatient, partial hospitalization, or other services

School
- IEPs and evaluations
- Relevant disciplinary or nursing records
- Other records that help show your child's needs and functioning

Important events
- Mental health crises
- Significant changes in functioning
- Work or school difficulties
- Other events that help tell the story

Communication
- Keep a record of important conversations with providers, schools, Social Security, and other agencies.
- Bring updated information about symptoms and functioning to appointments.

Most important: Keep the information accurate. The goal isn't to make your child look better or worse; it's to help others understand what life is really like for your child.

Make sure providers know what is happening

One of Thomas's strongest recommendations was to make sure that important information gets into the person's medical records.

She suggests bringing a short list of current symptoms to appointments and updating it as things change. Even if a provider says, "I know that already," she recommends sharing the information again.

For example:

"Crying spells: one to three times a week, lasting 5–30 minutes."

Or:

"Nightmares: four to five times a night."

The numbers don't have to look exactly like these examples. What matters is being specific and updating the information when the frequency or severity changes.

"These are not static," Thomas explained. "If the numbers get better, change the numbers. If the numbers get worse, change the numbers."

Thomas recommends telling providers about medication side effects and other changes in symptoms rather than assuming they already know.

Information from family members can also be important. If a child or young person is having frequent meltdowns, becoming aggressive, isolating themselves, or experiencing significant changes at home, parents and caregivers can keep a record and make sure the prescribing or other medical provider knows about it.

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Upcoming PPAL Events:

11/23 - The Mental Health IEP
https://bit.ly/MHIEP1123

11/30 My Child's Not Going To School: What Now?
https://bit.ly/school-1130

January 2027: Town Hall with the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH)

- With Guests: *DMH Commissioner* ***Emily Bailey*** and *Deputy Commissioner Child, Youth, Family Services* ***Charlene Zuffante***

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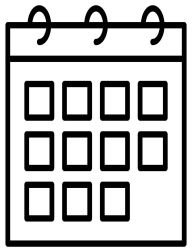
Save the Date:

PPAL's 16th Annual Children's Mental Health Conference

Plan to join us for the **LARGEST** Children's Mental Health Conference **in New England**!

Friday, May 21, 2027.



Add the conference to your calendar and look out for our emails as we enter 2027!

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Contact Us!

Parent/Professional Advocacy League

Info and Request Support:

https://ppal.net/

866-815-8122

Sign up for our Newsletter and Emails: info@ppal.net

Follow us on Social Media

- Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/PPAL.net/
- Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/ppal.mass/
- YouTube: @PPALforFamilies

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Welcome!

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Stefanie Krantz (she/her)
Senior Attorney
Disability Law Center, Inc.



Emily Howland
Parent Advocate, Commonwealth's Restraint and Seclusion Prevention Initiative
Volunteer, Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint (AASR)

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To join in, you can



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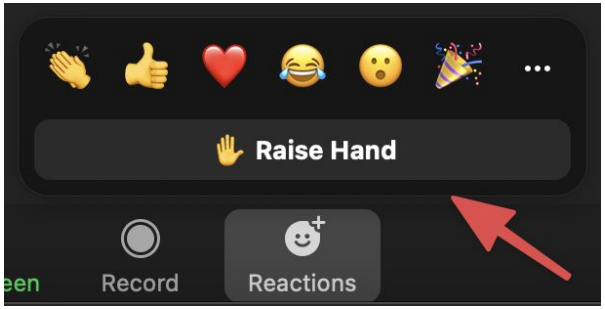



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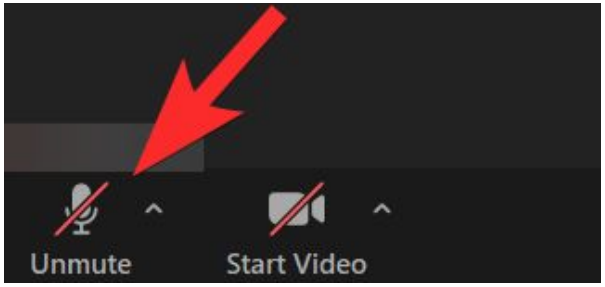



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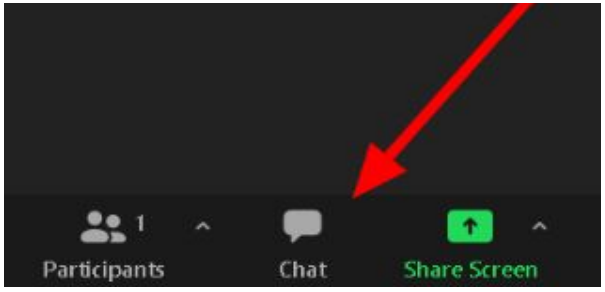

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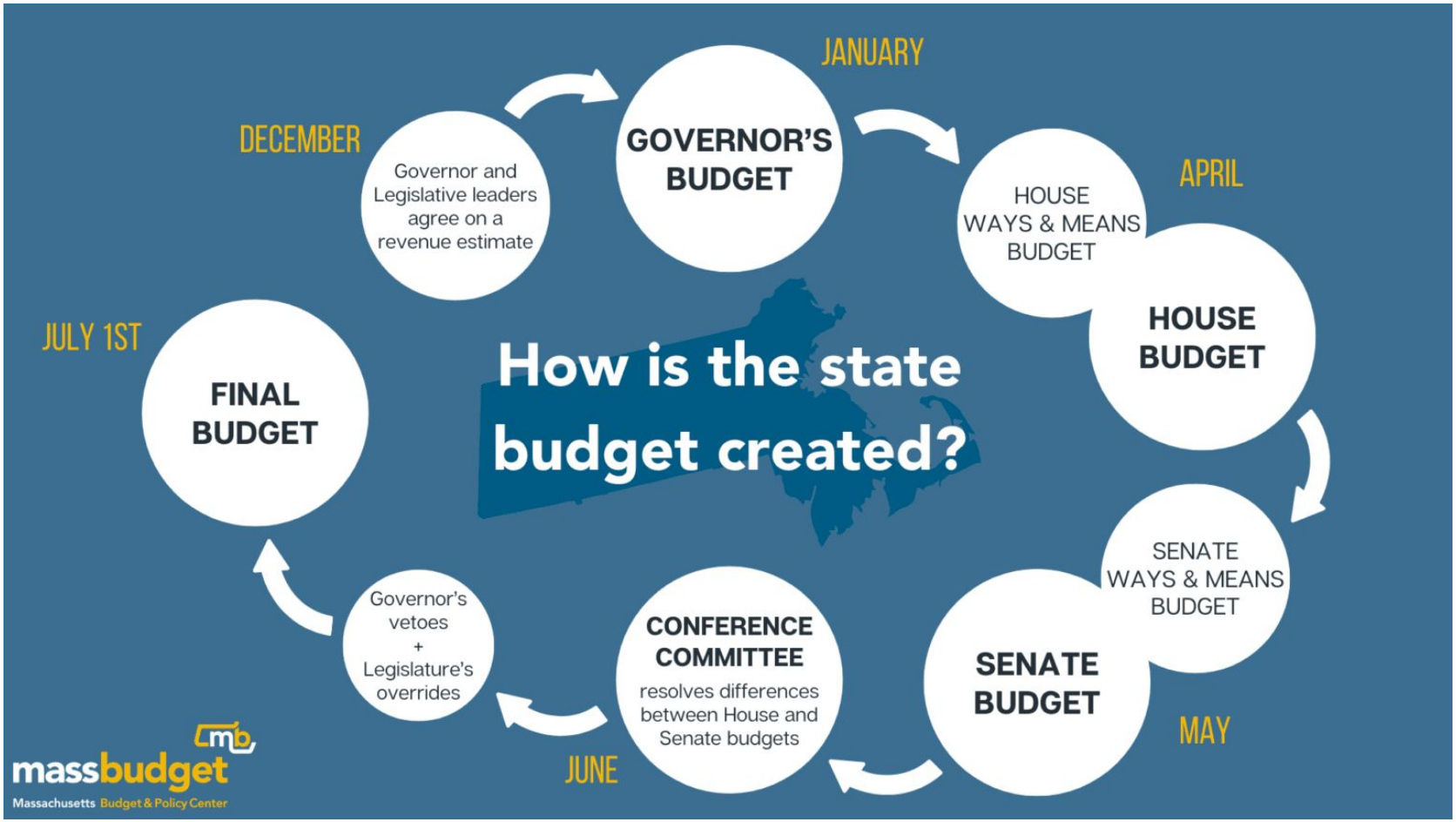
Massachusetts Budget Process Timeline

Overview



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Massachusetts Legislative Process Timeline

Overview



- Legislative sessions are 2 years, and begin on the odd numbered year– 2025, 2027
- Prospective laws, called Bills, are filed early in the session, and the rest of the 2-year session is spent deciding their fates
- State Senate and State House of Representatives come together in ***Joint Committees*** - a variety of *subject-specific working groups*.
  - Joint Committees hear from interested parties - ***YOU*** - about whether bills should be passed
- There are multiple times throughout the 2 year session to advocate for each bill!

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Legislation: What Can I Do?

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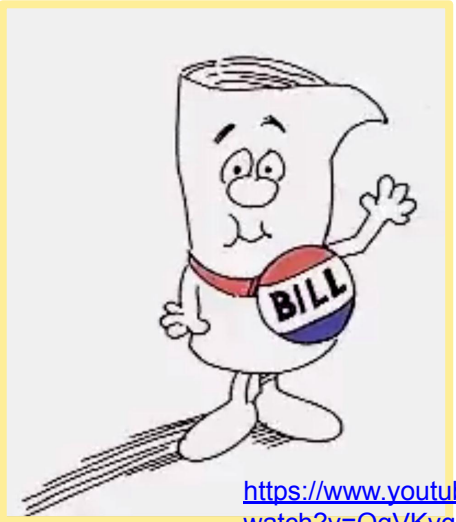
Learn More About Children's Mental Health Advocacy and Legislation!

- Contact your State Senator and Representative
  - Look up yours here: https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator
  - Ask them to support the bills that are important to you and your family
  - Are they already supporting it? Thank them for their support– a reminder that it is important!
  - Legislators don't need hundreds of requests to support bills– just a few from their community let them know how important it is. Your voice really makes a difference in local issues!

- Learn more about issues that are important to you!
  - Stay Informed: subscribe to organizations who report out on legislative updates!

- Learn how the Massachusetts Legislature works!
  - https://www.masslegalservices.org/content/legislative-process-massachusetts-0



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgVKvqTItto

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Legislation: What Can I Do?

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Learn About Legislative Hearings and Testimony

- **What is a Legislative Committee Hearing?**
  - Bills that have been introduced go to a committee, based on their topic, to be studied and reviewed.
  - Each committee sets a hearing date and invites the public to comment on the bills, called a Legislative Testimony, more below!
  - Based on what the committees learn, they decide to, essentially, move the bill forward, edit the bill, refer the bill to a different committee, or decide the bill "Ought Not To Pass."

- **What is a Legislative Testimony?**
  - Any interested party can comment on bills at Committee Hearings!
  - Intention is to educate the committee.
  - Testimony can be spoken during the hearing, or submitted in writing.
  - Spoken Testimony can only be 3 minutes long for individuals, 6 minutes long for 'panels' of no more than 3 people.
  - See scheduled committee hearings, register to testify here, or watch previously held hearings here!: https://malegislature.gov/Events

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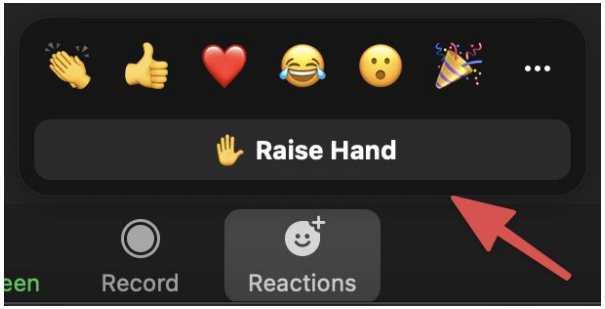



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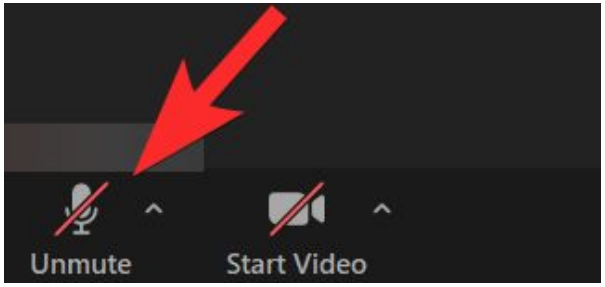



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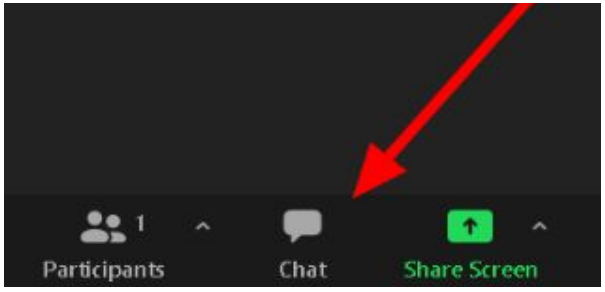

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Family Advocacy Alliance (FAA)

Our Goal

FAA's goal is to identity a caregiver/family in <u>every</u> legislative district in Massachusetts

Will you help us?
https://bit.ly/FAA-26

There are 40 Senate districts and 160 House of Representative districts in Massachusetts.





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Question Of The Month

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PPAL'S November Question of the Month

Are you raising a child or supporting a young adult with behavioral health needs?

Are school staffing shortages affecting your child?



To Answer the Question, Please Visit
https://ppal.net/question-of-the-month/

QR Instructions:

1. Open the camera app on your cellphone
2. Position the QR code like you're going to photograph it.
3. Click the link that appears to go to the website

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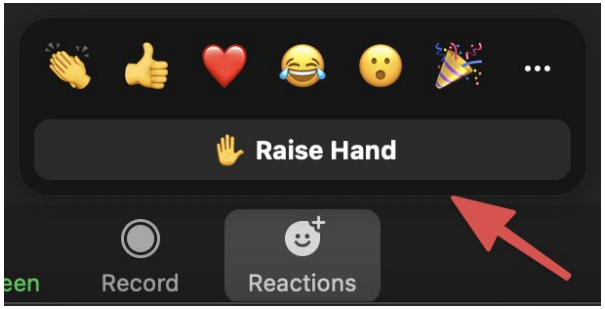



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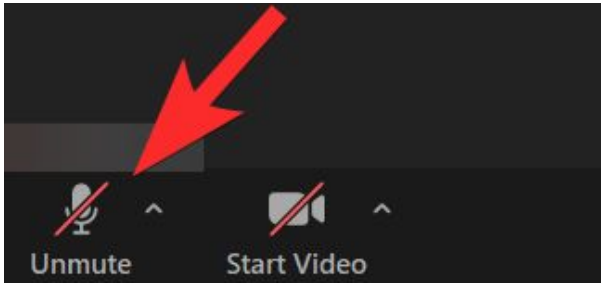



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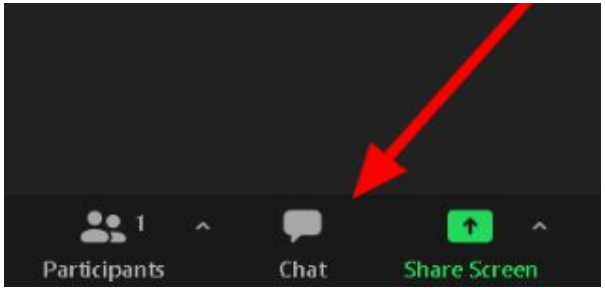

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Office of the Child Advocate (OCA)

updates

Juvenile Court Forms Now Include Youth Attorneys.

- Helps young people identify their lawyer and access legal support, especially affecting those in congregate care.
- Look up attorneys here: https://www.massbbo.org/s/



Three winners will each receive a $200 gift card, and submissions are open through **December 15**.

Learn more:
https://www.mass.gov/info-details/office-of-the-child-advocate-young-adult-artwork-contest

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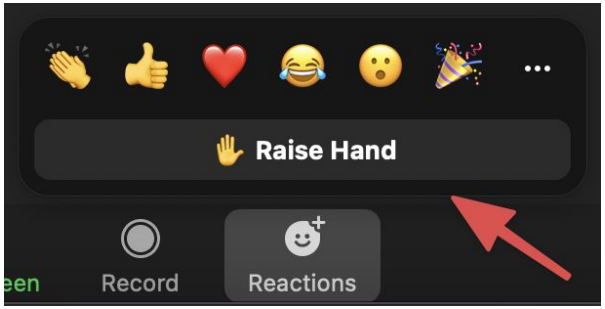



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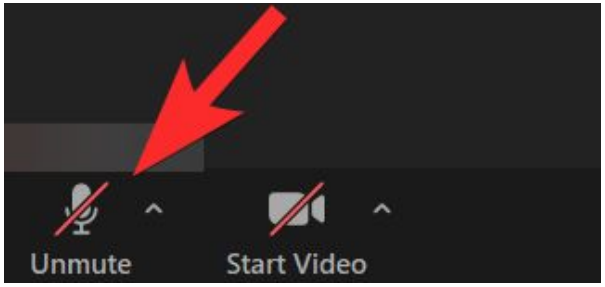



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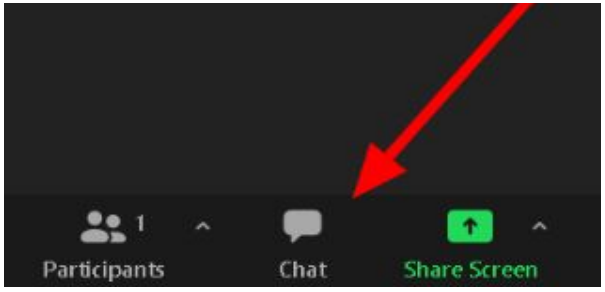

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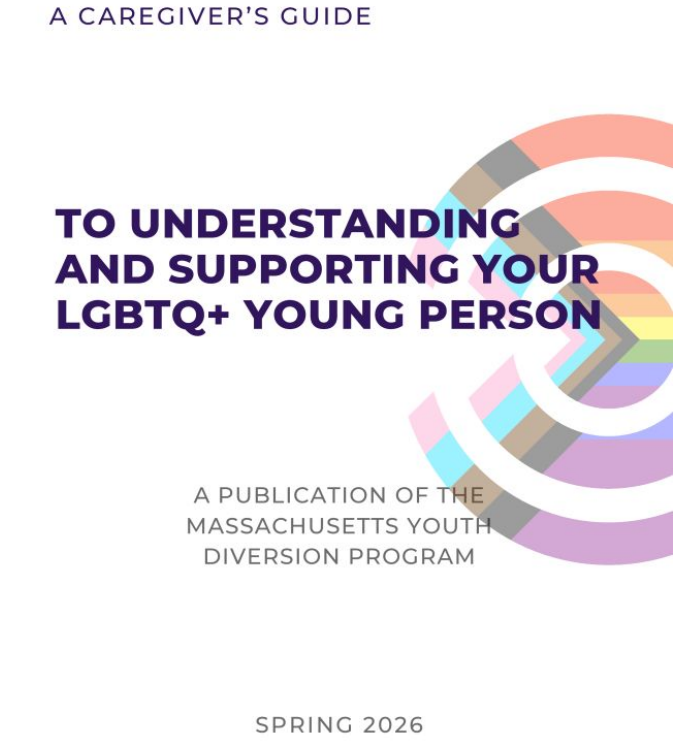
New LGBTQIA+ Youth Resources



A Caregiver's Guide To Understanding And Supporting Your LGBTQ+ Young Person

- for parents and caregivers of LGBTQ+ youth participating in the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program.
- created in partnership between the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP), the Department of Youth Services (DYS), and the Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL).
- https://www.mass.gov/doc/a-caregivers-guide-to-understanding-and-supporting-your-lgbtq-young-person/download

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New LGBTQIA+ Youth Resources

Parent/Professional Advocacy League



Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth Releases 2026 Recommendations outlining policy, programmatic, and budget priorities to improve outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth across the Commonwealth.
https://www.mass.gov/doc/mclgbtqy-annual-recommendations-fy-2026/download

Massachusetts LGBTQ+ Resource Database
https://www.mass.gov/resource/mclgbtqy-commission-resource-database

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- Survivor resources →
- Youth community centers →

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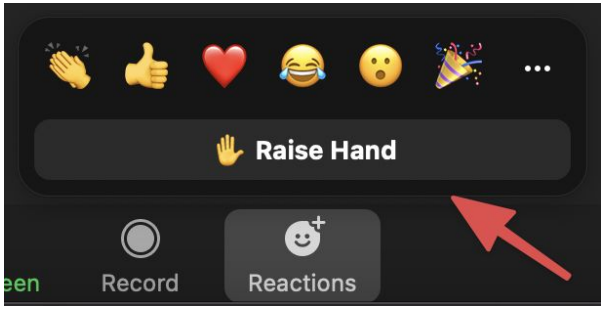



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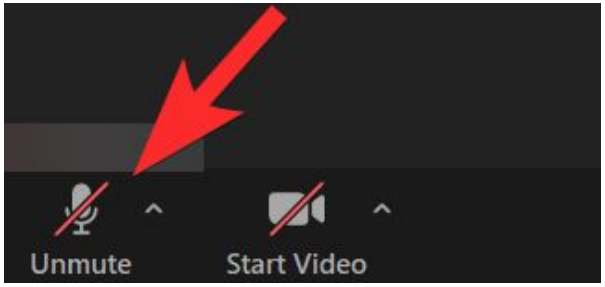



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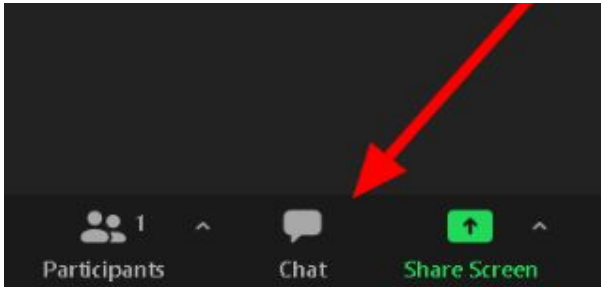

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Scan the QR code
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2. Position the QR code like you're going to photograph it.
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Networking—

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Do you have

Resources

Job Opportunities

Recommendations

Requests

that you would like to share?

Please come off mute, or indicate in the chat that you would like to speak!

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Thank You for attending PPAL's Inside Track!

You will receive the bulletins and resources discussed within the next few days.

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- **text**

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