



Advocacy and Legislative Committee

Updated April 2025

General Committee Description

The Michigan Library Association's Advocacy and Legislative Committee is a standing committee. The committee's role is to:

- Ensure the needs of libraries, librarians and the communities they serve are addressed in the legislature, the administration and the courts; and
- Drive the strategy and discussions for MLA's advocacy efforts
- Support MLA in safeguarding intellectual freedom and first amendment rights in Michigan's libraries.

Committee Membership and Meetings

The Advocacy and Legislative Committee shall be made up of between 15-30 MLA members and board members. The Executive Director serves as staff liaison.

All committee members are required to attend a virtual MLA volunteer development training. Committee meetings are held the first Monday of each month at 10:00 a.m. for up to 2 hours. Meetings will be held by zoom unless in-person is warranted.

Committee members must be aware of topics and issues affecting libraries. Forward any issues for committee consideration to the MLA office or committee chair prior to the meeting so they can be included on the agenda as appropriate and supporting material can be provided.

Committee members may also be called on from time to time to provide comment on an issue or topic to assist our lobbyists in their efforts, to help determine its importance to the library community as a whole or discover its potential impact to your library. Please be sure to respond so your perspective is considered.

Additional meetings of sub-groups (legislative readers group, topic groups, etc.) will meet as needed to accomplish goals.

Authority and Responsibilities

The Advocacy and Legislative Committee shall:

- Monitor legislative and policy issues impacting libraries;
- Make policy recommendations to the MLA Board;

- Inform and educate members about state legislation and policy issues; and
- Contact legislators as needed to educate them about library concerns
- Review applications and make recommendations for fund allocation from the MLA Advocacy Resource Fund in defense of intellectual freedom and board training opportunities.
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Committee Terms

One-year terms beginning in July and concluding the following June. Committee members are encouraged to remain on the committee for multiple years.

Chair and Vice Chair Selection

The chair of the committee will be approved and selected from within the MLA Board Members and will serve until a new board member is named. The vice chair will be filled from within the current committee membership and is named by MLA staff. All current members are given an opportunity to voice their interest in serving on committee and as the vice chair.

Qualifications

This is an opportunity for an individual who is passionate about the success of MLA's legislative priorities and has a keen knowledge of the legislative process and issues. The selected members will have achieved leadership stature in MLA and/or in Michigan libraries. Member's accomplishments will allow them to attract other well-qualified, high-performing leaders to the committee.

Service Without Remuneration

Service on Michigan Library Association's Committees are without remuneration or additional discounts for event attendance.

Preparation

Committee members will receive an agenda via email a few days in advance of the meeting. It will include an agenda plus a link to MLA's website with current legislation and priorities highlighted. Please review your packet so you are prepared to discuss each agenda item.

Lobbyists

Our lobbyist, GCSI, works closely with the committee and MLA to lobby on behalf of the library community. They have an excellent grasp of library issues and exceptional working relationships with legislators and their staff. They will participate in our meetings each month and provide a legislative update. You should feel free to ask questions or ask for more information on any issue during the meeting. Any other contact with the lobbyists should come through the MLA office or the committee chair.

Legislators

If you do not know who your state elected officials are, please take a moment to visit the MLA website at <https://www.milibraries.org/find-your-legislators>.

Legislator Contact

Each member of the committee is expected to contact their state representative and senator by phone, letter, email or in person. Most legislators hold regular coffee hours or other events in district to meet with constituents. Many libraries host these events. Be sure to attend and introduce yourself. Let them know how your library serves its community through events, programs and resources and also with Internet access to employment resources and State of Michigan services.

Talking Points

MLA will provide talking points as appropriate to assist you with your legislator contacts. If you need additional information don't hesitate to contact MLA.

Perspective

While each library is unique and may be impacted in a variety of ways by legislation or other issues, it's important to keep the statewide perspective in mind. By serving on this committee you are representing your entire library community. Be aware the MLA is working to address the needs of libraries statewide and may not have the ability to work on an issue specific to a single library. In addition, there may be issues that do not affect your library but pertain to a number of other libraries. Be sure to keep the statewide view in mind.

Media Contact

If you are contacted by the media and choose to speak on a topic, please be sure to make clear you are speaking on behalf of your library or as an individual citizen. Comment on behalf of MLA should come only from the MLA office. Always feel free to refer any media calls to MLA.

Reasonable People Sometimes Disagree

Politics by its very nature lends itself to a variety of opinions. It is important that you provide a well thought out and respectful view on a subject. If you find yourself on the opposite side of a committee decision, please understand there can be more than one side of an issue and the committee will take a well-informed position.

Process and Guidelines

For our purposes, there are three types of bills: Bills that are MLA priorities to pass or defeat, bills that MLA needs to react and respond to, and bills that have nothing to do with libraries. Thankfully, the vast majority of bills fall into the third category and never have to come before the committee.

MLA Priorities

1. Each year, MLA will conduct a survey of its members to establish priorities for advocacy work. At all annual meetings of the members, MLA will make it a priority to inform members of the legislative priorities and will elicit feedback on our advocacy goals.

2. The MLA Advocacy and Legislative Committee will analyze the results of the survey/input and establish legislative priorities, ranked in order of priority, for the year and for future work. (These priorities can be specific, like introduce and pass legislation to allow librarians to administer NARCAN; or they can be broader, like oppose any legislation that would change how penal fines are administered.) The MLA Advocacy and Legislative Committee will formally vote to recommend this list to the MLA Board for approval.
3. The MLA Board will review the recommendations from the Advocacy and Legislative Committee, make changes/updates, if necessary, and vote to approve the priority list.
4. If later in the session it becomes necessary to make an addition to the list, the same process (steps 1-3) should be followed.
5. Once the priorities list is set, it is up to the MLA Executive Director and the lobbying team to create and execute a plan to accomplish the priorities – keeping the committee and the board informed as the work progresses.

Bills that MLA Needs to React and Respond To

This is the group of bills that pop up other than those on our priorities list. The process that we use to take positions on these bills is similar to the process used above, but it is done on a monthly basis as part of MLA's Legislative committee meetings.

1. A bill can be flagged by GCSI or anyone else that hears about forthcoming legislation. All members, GCSI, or any other person/entity will notify the MLA Executive Director and the bill will be placed on the agenda for the next legislative committee meeting.
2. At the meeting, the MLA Legislative Committee will discuss the substance of the bill, the political realities that surround the bill, the likelihood that the bill can/will be passed, and how the bill will impact Libraries.
3. Then the Legislative Committee can take one of several actions:
 - a. First, the committee can choose to support, support with language changes, oppose, stay neutral but monitor progress, or take no position at all. A formal recommendation by the legislative committee to the MLA board must include the reason for their position.
 - b. Second, the committee could choose to ask the MLA Executive Director to take a poll of MLA members to better inform their decision and delay a decision by a month.
 - c. Third, the committee could choose to pass the issue on to the MLA board for a final decision if the legislative committee cannot come to a consensus or if the issue is too important to be decided at the committee level.

If an MLA member has a legislative idea that they would like to pursue, they have two options. First, they can go through the process outlined above to try and make the issue an MLA priority.

Second, and probably more commonly, they should approach the MLA Executive Director, legislative committee, or any member of the board of directors about their idea, before they contact a legislator or lobbyist, and ask them to consider it.

Readers Sub-Group

A small group of committee members will be selected to serve on the Readers Sub-Group to read legislation and identify what is and is not pertinent to bring forward to the full committee. This sub-group will be led by the chair of the Advocacy and Legislative Committee. Monthly meeting will take place one week prior to the full committee to review legislative priorities that have come to their attention and help set the agenda for the upcoming meeting.