

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Influencing your local CMH board (who's who and how to testify)

Somewhere in your county, twelve people you've never met vote on the policies and budgets that shape your family member's services. Their meetings are public. Almost nobody shows up.

BY JIM PALASTY · 10 MIN READ · TWELVE STRANGERS VOTING ON YOUR FAMILY'S SERVICES

12

MEMBERS TYPICALLY SITTING ON A MICHIGAN CMH BOARD

Appointed by the county board of commissioners, these twelve people set policy direction and approve budgets. Meetings are public under Michigan's Open Meetings Act. Attendance is usually sparse.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

The board exists, mostly unseen

CMH boards meet regularly, set policy, and approve budgets, almost entirely without public attendance.



STEP 2

Meetings are legally public

Michigan's Open Meetings Act guarantees your right to attend and, typically, to offer public comment.



STEP 3

Effective testimony follows a pattern

Specific issues, concrete solutions, and real data move a board more than general frustration.

What effective testimony includes

A specific issue	Name the exact policy, budget line, or decision
Concrete data	A number, a wait time, a documented denial
A real impact	How this affects your family, briefly and specifically
A proposed solution	What you're actually asking the board to do
A follow-up ask	Request a written response or a future agenda item

THE THREE MINUTES THAT GOT A POLICY REVISITED

“

Trina attended her first CMH board meeting simply to understand the format, expecting to say nothing. Three months later, she testified for exactly three minutes about a specific documentation policy that had delayed her son's respite hours for six weeks. She cited the delay, the specific policy language, and one proposed fix. The board asked staff to review the policy at the next meeting. It wasn't an immediate win. It was the first time anyone with power had actually looked at the problem directly.

THREE MINUTES, ONE SPECIFIC ASK, AND A POLICY THAT HAD BEEN INVISIBLE FOR YEARS FINALLY GOT LOOKED AT.

What matters, at a glance

MICHIGAN SPECIFIC

12 appointed members

Board members are appointed by the county board of commissioners, not elected, and typically serve staggered terms.

Sets policy and budget

The board's core function is approving CMH policy direction and budget allocations for the entire county system.

Meetings run mostly empty

Public comment periods exist at almost every meeting. Almost nobody uses them.

Open Meetings Act applies

Michigan law guarantees these meetings are public, with notice requirements and a right to attend.

3-minute testimony window

Most boards limit public comment to roughly three minutes per speaker. Structure your testimony to fit.

Data beats emotion, but both matter

Specific issues backed by concrete data and a proposed solution carry more weight than general frustration alone.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Your CMH board's meeting schedule and public comment rules | ☐ A specific issue, with dates and documentation if possible |
| ☐ A three-minute testimony draft, timed in advance | ☐ A concrete, specific ask (not a general complaint) |
| ☐ Contact information for following up in writing afterward | |

YOUR MOVE

When you want to influence your CMH board, here is how to start

- 1 Find your CMH board's meeting schedule and location.
- 2 Attend one meeting simply to observe the format.
- 3 Identify one specific issue, policy, or budget line to address.
- 4 Draft a three-minute testimony with a concrete ask.
- 5 Deliver testimony during the public comment period.
- 6 Follow up in writing requesting a response or future agenda item.

Twelve people vote on your family's services in a room that's almost always empty. Showing up is most of the battle.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

cmham.org · <https://cmham.org>

michiganallianceforfamilies.org · <https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org>

Informational only. Not legal or medical advice. Verify current program rules before acting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JP

Jim Palasty

Jim Palasty is the founder of OASIS for Autism and a single father of an adult autistic daughter in Michigan.