



Effective legislative advocacy for RNs

Your voice matters

Visiting a legislator

Face-to-face visits are the most effective form of legislative advocacy. You can request to meet with your legislator in Lansing or in the district. Some legislators hold regular coffee hours at home, and that can be a great opportunity to talk.

Remember: You're the expert on your own experiences as a registered nurse. Be confident that what you have to say is valuable. Here are some tips to help you succeed with your advocacy:

1. Know your audience: Your preparation should include research on your legislator. This knowledge can help you build a relationship, especially if that person has a nurse in the family or has sponsored healthcare legislation. If a legislator has sponsored or co-sponsored legislation you support, make sure to say thank you. Know which other groups support your issue and which oppose it.

2. Stick to your message: Practice your main points and identify the goal of the meeting before you go. Be concise, stick to basics, and stay focused on ONE issue. Try to anticipate the arguments against your position, and be prepared to address them. Bring BRIEF supportive documents to share.

3. Make it personal: Explain why this issue is important to you as a registered nurse, as well as how it affects your patients and community. Give examples (while protecting patient confidentiality). *Sharing your story is powerful.*

4. Make it relevant: Legislators, naturally, care most about their own districts. Make sure you're explaining how the issue affects patients, healthcare workers and businesses they represent.



MNA members visit with state Sen. Rebekah Warren of Ann Arbor, Senate sponsor of the Safe Patient Care Act.

5. Make it a conversation: Explain who you are, where you work, the kind of care you provide and who your patients are. Then, after you deliver your message, make sure to actively listen to the legislator's concerns and questions. Be aware of the nonverbal signals you're sending as well as ones you are seeing.

6. Budget your time: When you schedule your visit, ask how long your appointment will be. Most meetings last less than 30 minutes, so plan your conversations accordingly.

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7. Accept meetings with staff: It is not uncommon for staff to meet with constituents. Meeting with legislators' staffers can be very valuable.

8. "I don't know" is OK: If you don't know something, it's OK to say so. Offer to find the answers and get back to the legislator.

9. Don't use jargon or acronyms: Most legislators don't have a healthcare background. Make no assumptions about their level of knowledge. Use the same principles you use when educating patients.

10. Don't burn bridges: Always maintain a courteous attitude. It's OK to disagree with a legislator's positions or politely correct misconceptions; it's inappropriate and counterproductive to show anger, rudeness or disrespect.

11. Request action: After you make your points, make your specific expectation clear (e.g., "I'm asking you to vote yes on this bill") and try to get a commitment from the legislator. Make sure they know your position and the expectations you have of them.

At the end of the meeting, thank the legislator and offer to be a contact for nursing questions.

Follow up: Send a card or letter to thank the legislator for taking the time to talk with you. Highlight the key points of your message and the action you are requesting. Make sure to send any additional information you said you would provide, and include your contact information. **Keep in touch.**

Calling a legislator

- Plan exactly what you want to say before you call. Prepare an outline to cover the major points.
- Begin and end by stating your name and identifying yourself as a registered nurse and a constituent.
- Ask to speak to the staff person who handles the issue you wish to discuss.
- Deliver a brief and simple message; for example, **"Please vote in favor of HB 5103 and SB 574."** Say why in a few sentences.
- If no one is available to talk, leave a message that includes your main point.
- Be courteous even if you disagree with a position.
- Leave a phone number and email address where you can be reached; offer to provide more information about the issue.
- Follow up with a brief letter.



MNA members visit with state Rep. Jon Hoadley of Kalamazoo, House sponsor of the Safe Patient Care Act.

Writing to a legislator

Note: It is always best to write a card or letter, rather than an email. Legislators pay more attention to personal correspondence than form letters or mass emails.

- State your purpose and your request in the first paragraph.
- State that you're a registered nurse and a constituent, or identify any connection with the legislator's district.
- Describe your practice and the patient population you serve.
- Address only one issue per letter.
- Refer to legislation by number and title.
- Keep your letter to one page.
- Make your point clearly, but do so in a courteous and respectful manner.
- Support your position with research or other reliable information and with your own experiences. Local examples of how the legislation will impact patients, healthcare workers and businesses in the legislator's district have the greatest impact.
- Be constructive. If you believe the legislation is the wrong approach, explain what you believe to be the right approach.

SAFE PATIENT CARE ACT
HB 5013 and SB 574
Every **patient**. Every **shift**.



**To share your story
about short staffing or
email your legislator,
visit www.MIsaferhospitals.org.**