



MNA members with state Rep. Sarah Anthony of Lansing, a supporter of the Safe Patient Care Act.

Effective legislative advocacy for RNs

Your voice matters

MI **NURSES** Association

Visiting a legislator

Personal visits are the most effective form of legislative advocacy. You can request to meet with your legislator in Lansing or in the district, or attend coffee hours if they have them. Many are doing these virtually at this time.

MNA staff can help you arrange your meeting and prepare for it by providing background information, training and written materials to share with legislators.

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:

Do your research, including research on your legislator. This knowledge can help you build a relationship, especially if that person has a background in healthcare. Know the legislation you're advocating on well, and know which other groups support and oppose it. Bring BRIEF supportive documents to share (MNA can provide these). Try to anticipate the arguments against your position, and be prepared to address them.

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

Accept meetings with staff: It is not uncommon for staff to meet with constituents, since legislators are very busy. These meetings can be extremely valuable.

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. You may have to redirect a conversation back to what you came to talk about.



MNA members visit with state Rep. Sara Cambensy, sponsor of part of the Safe Patient Care Act.

Make it personal and local: Explain who you are, where you work, the kind of care you provide and who your patients are. Explain why this issue is important to you as a registered nurse and how it affects your patients and community. **Give examples (while protecting patient confidentiality).** Remember: Sharing your story is powerful.

Make it a conversation: After you deliver your message, make sure to listen to the legislator's concerns and questions. Be aware of the nonverbal signals you're sending and the ones you are seeing. Be prepared to adapt if the conversation goes in a surprising direction.

Never lie or mislead someone: If you are asked something and you don't know the answer, it's OK to say so. Offer to find the answers and get back to the legislator, or ask MNA staff to do so.

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Avoid 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.

Don't burn bridges: Always maintain a courteous attitude. It's OK to disagree with a legislator's positions or politely correct misconceptions. Rudeness, disrespectful behavior and name-calling are inappropriate and counterproductive. That goes for comments made on social media, too.

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. 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 information you said you would provide.

AFTER THE VISIT: Stay in touch! Effective advocates build relationships with their legislators over time. MNA can help with this, and guide you on how to be most effective advocate possible given the current legislative strategy and climate. Both of these can change quickly.

Calling your 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 staffer who handles the issue you want to discuss.
- Deliver a brief and simple message; for example, "I want the Senator to vote in favor of Senate Bill XX." Say why in a few sentences.
- Always be courteous, even if you disagree with the legislator.
- Leave a phone number and email address where you can be reached; offer to provide more information about the issue.
- If the proper person isn't available, leave a message or voicemail with your main points, and request a call back.
- Follow up with a brief letter (or e-mail).



State Rep. Abdullah Hammoud of Dearborn, a state and national health policy expert, advises MNA Advocacy Academy members on how to influence legislators.

Writing to your legislator

It is always best to write a card or letter. Legislators pay more attention to personal correspondence or calls than online form letters or mass emails.

- State that you're a registered nurse and a constituent, or identify any connection with the legislator's district.
- State your purpose and request in the first paragraph.
- Refer to legislation by number (and title, if appropriate).
- Describe your practice and the population you serve.
- Address only one issue per letter.
- Keep your letter to one page.
- Make your point clearly and courteously.
- Support your position with research or other reliable information and, **most of all, your own experiences as an RN - tell your story.** Examples of how the bill(s) will affect patients, healthcare workers and businesses in the legislator's district have the greatest impact.
- Be constructive. If you believe a bill is the wrong approach, explain what you believe would be better.
- End with a thank-you and offer to discuss this (and other nursing issues) further at any time, and include your contact info.



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