

Advocacy for RNs: Visiting Your Legislator



State Sen. Sarah Anthony of Lansing meets with MNA members at our annual Capitol Action Day.

Personal visits are the most effective form of advocacy. You can request to meet with your legislator in Lansing or in the district. Many also host coffee hours that you can attend.

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

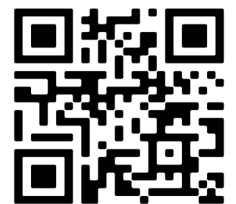
You're the expert on your own experiences as a registered nurse. Be confident that what you have to say is valuable. Personal stories and experience are the most effective advocacy tool. Here are some tips to help:

- **Avoid jargon or acronyms:** Most legislators don't have a healthcare background. Make no assumptions about their legislators' knowledge. Use the same principles as when educating patients.
- **Do your research:** including research on your legislator. Your legislator may already support your position, and that will affect your approach. Know the legislation. Bring BRIEF supportive documents to share (MNA can provide these). Try to anticipate the arguments against your position.
- **Budget your time and be succinct:** When you schedule your visit, ask how long your meeting will be. Most are less than 30 minutes, so plan your conversations accordingly.
- **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.

- **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 an RN 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, listen to the legislator's concerns and questions. Be aware of the nonverbal signals you're sending and seeing. Be prepared to adapt if the conversation goes in a surprising direction.
- **Never lie or mislead:** 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.
- **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 also goes for comments made on social media.
- **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. 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 given the current legislative strategy and climate.

**FIND YOUR
LEGISLATOR**



minurses.org/advocacyresources

MI NURSES Association

Affiliate of National Nurses United and AFL-CIO

