

Guide to Lobbying

Contacting Your Legislators

Identify the legislators that represent you on the state and national levels and find out their local addresses and telephone numbers. You can get this information from the post office, local Democratic or Republican party headquarters, or county commissioners office. If you have a specific issue you want to pursue, you will need to following:

1. The correct name and title of the legislator;
2. The bill number and working title of the legislation;
3. The appropriate KSNA positions that do or do not support the legislation and reasons why;
4. The implications of the legislation to you as an individual.

You should send the communication to the legislator's current location - the home office or the legislative office, depending upon the recess schedule.

There are three levels of involvement at which you can participate. The first is letter writing; the second is telephone calls; and the third is personal meetings with the legislators. Follow this guide and you will find the legislators extremely open to your discussion.

The Right to Write

Very few people write their legislators. This reluctance to communicate stems from feelings that legislators have no time or inclination to read their mail, or a letter will probably not be answered, or that one letter will not make any difference. These notions are wrong and the belief in these notions erodes the power of nurses in the legislative arena. Staff members may initially process the mail, but the legislator is aware of the content of each letter.

1. Address it properly

U.S. Senator
The Honorable (full name)
United States Senator
Address
Dear Senator (last name):

State Senator
The Honorable (full name)
State Senator
Kansas Senate
Topeka, KS 66612
Dear Senator (last name):

U.S. Representative
The Honorable (full name)
United State Representative
Address
Dear Congressman/woman (last name):

State Representative
The Honorable (full name)
State Representative
Kansas House of Representatives
Topeka, KS 66612
Dear Representative (last name):

2. Include your name, address and phone number on the letter.

A letter cannot be answered if there is no return address or the signature is not legible.

3. Identify the bill or issue.

Hundreds of bills are introduced each session of the Kansas Legislature. It is important to be specific. If you write about a bill, give the bill number or describe it by popular title.

4. Time the arrival of your letter.

Try to write to your legislator and the chairperson of the committee dealing with a bill while it is still in committee so there is time to take effective action.

5. Use your own words.

A personal letter is far better than a form letter or signature on a petition. Form letters tend to be identified with pressure campaigns and may be answered with form replies. For nurses in practice, indicate where you work and how long you've been a nurse.

6. Be brief and stick to one subject.

A single page letter, presenting your opinions, facts, arguments, or proposals as clearly as possible, is preferred and welcome by most legislators.

7. Give reasons for your position.

Explain how the issue could affect you, your family, business, or profession - or the effect on your community or the state. If you have specialized knowledge, share it with your legislator.

8. Write a letter of appreciation.

Write a letter of appreciation when you feel a legislator has done a good job. Legislators are human too and seldom receive "thank you" letters of encouragement.

9. Provide feedback to KSNA.

Inform the KSNA staff when you have made contact with your legislator. A simple note will be sufficient, or a carbon copy of the letter mailed. This will assist the KSNA lobbyists in making contacts in the Legislature.

Telephone Calls

Telephone calls should be used selectively for only the most urgent issues.

1. Know the issue and your position.
2. Prepare an outline so that you cover all major points.
3. Follow up with a personal letter to the legislator citing the name of the staff member with whom you spoke. To find the telephone number of members of Congress in Washington, call (202) 225-3121. When the operator answers ask for Senators and Representatives by name and state. To obtain the telephone number of your state legislators, call the Secretary of the Senate at (785) 296-2456 or the Clerk of the House, Kansas House of Representatives at (785) 296-7633.

Meetings

Meetings with legislators can take place in Washington, in Topeka, or while they are home during a legislative recess. Some key point to remember are:

1. Make an appointment. It's better to make an appointment with your legislator's office than to drop in unannounced. You may wish to go as a team with other nurses from your area. If your legislator is unavailable, meet with the legislative assistant.
2. Introduce yourself. Carefully choose those characteristics about yourself which will establish you as a credible resource to the legislator, e.g., where you live, where you work, and what you do. Be brief and selective.
3. Set the agenda. Decide ahead of time what you are going to talk about. If you are in a group, select a spokesperson to lead the discussion. Be brief and confine your comments as much as possible to the specific issues being discussed. You will get more attention if you make a few points clearly and concisely rather than trying to cover too many subjects.
4. Know your legislator's role. Most decisions on specific policy issues are made at the committee level. Members of key health committees have the potential to be very influential in policy making. Make sure you know which committees your legislators serve on in relation to the issues which will be discussed.
5. Learn your legislator's position. Listen carefully to your legislator's position with regard to specific issues. Ask good questions and try to find areas where the legislator may be sympathetic to your point of view. Avoid prolonged or controversial arguments. Threats won't help your case. Remember, the impression you leave may be more important than the subject of your discussion.
6. Develop an on-going relationship. It is better to leave your legislator undecided than committed against you, so take every possible step to prevent a firm commitment against your position. Leave with a friendly feeling. Leave the way open for another visit.

Take the time to write a thank you letter for the time spent meeting with you and summarize your view on the subjects discussed.

As a nurse and a citizen, you can find personal and professional satisfaction through increased involvement in the legislative process. Every time you contact your legislator to provide information and express your opinion, you actively affect legislative decision making. As a constituent, and as a nurse, your voice can and will make a difference.

*Adapted from The Missouri Nurse, Jan./Feb. 1986

For Further Information Contact:

Terri Roberts RN, JD
KSNA Lobbyist and Executive Director,
785-233-8638