



RN



Advocacy Basics

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

Did you know that your nursing practice, ability to care for patients safely, role in delegation/supervision of unlicensed care givers, ability to practice in an Advanced Nurse Practitioner role are all determined by state law, the “Nurse Practice Act.” Who determines what that law should be? The State Legislature.

YOU ARE THE EXPERT!

Legislators are elected officials who come from many walks of life with widely varying experience and knowledge of the health care system.

It is the role of the TNA and the GOVA committee to monitor all legislation and report to our members the status and implications of legislation, who is supportive of our positions or not as they relate to the practice of nursing and the health needs of Tennessee citizens. Our main goal is to ensure that nurses’ voices are heard and respected by legislators and policymakers.

WHY MUST NURSES VISIT AND DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR LEGISLATORS?

Nurses are experts in regard to the nursing profession. Nurses are advocates for quality health care delivery. Nurses need to ensure their representatives know them and identify them as a go-to source for information regarding legislation and policy.

SO, HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Do you need to be an expert about political and the legislative process to be effective and involved? Absolutely not! The only thing you need is the willingness to share your story of how legislative decisions impact your life, your profession, your family, your patients and Tennessee’s overall health. Everything else can be learned or helped with by the TNA staff. Remember, you are the expert in your field.

Sharing your experiences with legislators, listening to them, answering their questions and working with them to ensuring they have an understanding of our profession and the healthcare needs of Tennesseans is the most powerful way to advocate.

If nurses don’t talk to legislators and make relationships, other people will. The hospital CEO, administrator, doctors or other medical professionals will gladly tell legislators that everything is perfect in the nurse’s profession. But when nurses speak up and advocate, then nurses and patients win.

You will be most effective by getting to know your Senator and Representative from your own legislative District where you live or work. First of all, find out who they are and how to contact them. You can do this by visiting the Tennessee Nurses Association web site at www.tnaonline.org, clicking on "Advocacy," then "Tennessee General Assembly Links," then "Find My Legislators." Just enter your address and both your Senator and Representative will appear, complete with pictures and contact information.

HOW DO I FIND OUT WHAT LEGISLATION IS OUT THERE?

There are a number of ways to stay informed about legislation. The TNA website (www.tnaonline.org) houses a wealth of information. As the legislative session progresses, bills of interest and the TNA position and action will be posted. TNA members will receive regular e-mail alerts and status reports. On the General Assembly website at capitol.tn.gov, you can visit the various links and search for individual bills, bills sponsored by a particular legislator, the status of a bill—where it is in the process, how much it is expected to cost (fiscal note) and how legislators voted on any particular bill. You may watch the political process in real time! All committee meetings, and both the Senate and House sessions, are videotaped and available on the General Assembly website. If you need assistance or have questions about legislation and TNA's position, contact TNA's Government Affairs Director, Kathleen Murphy, Kathleen.Murphy@tnaonline.org.

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY LOBBY YOUR STATE LEGISLATORS:

DO YOUR HOMEWORK: Just as your time is very limited, so is a legislator's. Know the bill number (SB for Senate Version, HB for House Version) and your talking points. Have your facts ready. Know the Legislative Process and where your legislation is in it.

IDENTIFY YOURSELF: Introduce yourself as a registered nurse and a voter from a specific city or county by including your address. And remember, you are speaking on behalf of yourself as a nurse.

KEEP IT SIMPLE AND CLEAR: State your position clearly. Ask them for their positions and how they plan to vote. Offer to be available to answer any questions or provide more information.

BE FIRM, BUT FRIENDLY, PERSISTENT, AND NOT A PEST! Without making threats or promises, ask for your legislator's commitment to vote for or against a bill. Remember, you can call, email, write a letter, visit their office, or all of those options! You should encourage your colleagues to contact the legislators as well. There is strength in numbers!

CONCENTRATE ON THE ISSUE, NOT THE PERSON: Doing your homework and preparing for your conversation with your legislator will allow both of you to concentrate on the legislative issue. Even though it isn't always possible to remain in harmony with your legislator is a public servant trying to represent ALL of their constituents.

BE EVEN HANDED: Take time to follow up with your legislator when you approve of their action, as well as when you wish to voice your opposition to a bill. Always thank your legislator for a positive action on a request; they get lots of requests, but not many thanks. Be cooperative. Be realistic. Be practical. Never break your word...if you tell a legislator you will do something, do it. Continue to educate yourself regarding the legislative issues of concern to you. Bills change during the legislative process. Know where your bill is and what it looks like at all times.