



NANN State Advocacy Toolkit

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A first step in advocating at the state level is understanding a few of the basics on how your state government operates and where to find information.

1. Locate your state's website. Most state websites can be found by typing: [www.\(YourState\).gov](http://www.(YourState).gov).
2. The home page of your state government is an excellent place to find links to the branches of the state legislature and general announcements of key issues that may be taking place in your state.
3. From this home page connect to your state's legislature or legislative branch website. Here is where you will usually find links to your state's House of Representatives and your state's Senate. You may also be able to find a link to your specific State Representative and State Senator's website.
4. From your state's legislative website find the link to the legislative calendar to stay informed of when the legislature is in session. The legislative calendar link may have numerous listings such as the House and Senate schedule and links to committee meetings. When your state legislature is in recess, this is an excellent opportunity to meet with them in their districts.

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State Legislature Website

Your state's legislative website is an excellent resource for finding your individual state representative and state senator, as well as information regarding bills, resolutions and committees.

To locate your state's *legislature webpage*, go to your state's website and find the link to the State Legislature or Legislative Branch. On your state's legislature website look for the following resources:

1. The link to your state's House of Representatives and Senate. Here is where you may find links to :
 - ❖ House of Representative members
 - ❖ Senate members
 - ❖ Committees
 - ❖ Calendar of Events
 - ❖ How to contact your legislator
 - ❖ And more
2. The link to bills and resolutions is where you can:
 - ❖ Find the language of any bill / resolution
 - ❖ Search for bills by sponsor, committee, etc.
 - ❖ View most recent bill activity

Look for a link that will allow you to sign up for "*notification service*." (Usually found on the "Bills" web page.) This service allows you to be notified by email when activity occurs on an item in which you have an interest. This is an easy way to stay informed of bills and resolutions without having to keep checking the website.

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State Government in Action

Both the State House of Representatives and the State Senate have legislative committees. It is often at the committee level that advocacy can be most effective. It is helpful to know which committees your state representative and state senator are members of and if they are the chair of any committees. Some of the committees that are most influential to follow regarding nursing and maternal-child health care issues are:

- ❖ Health Policy Committee
- ❖ Family Services Committee
- ❖ Appropriations Committee
- ❖ Education Committee

Being a constituent of one of the members of any of these committees can be useful when advocating for specific pieces of legislation that may reside in one of these committees.

Legislators who “sponsor” a bill have the most interest in seeing the bill pass. An effective advocacy tool is to encourage your representative or senator to either sponsor or co-sponsor a bill to show their support for that piece of legislation.

Legislators appreciate hearing from their constituents and especially nurses when they are making decisions about health care policy. It can be useful to attend a committee hearing when a certain bill that affects the interests of the nursing profession, is being discussed.

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Testifying Before a Committee

Testifying before a Senate or House Committee can be a very effective tool when advocating in support or opposition to a certain piece of legislation. Two types of hearings may be held: (1) a regular committee meeting, and (2) a public hearing. Many committees will have set meeting dates and times. Legislators will also convene a public hearing when they are seeking information on a more controversial bill on the pros and cons of that legislation. Most committee meetings are open to the public. If you are fortunate enough to live close to your state capitol you are in a position to attend committee meetings when a bill of interest is being discussed.

Ways to stay informed on committee proceedings include:

1. Refer to your state's legislature website:
 - ❖ Check a committee's calendar
 - ❖ Check a bills activity
2. Sign up for notification of a committee's meeting schedule:
 - ❖ On the legislature website click on the link to committees
 - ❖ Click on the link of the committee of interest
 - ❖ Sign up for "*notification of committee meeting*"
 - ❖ You will receive an email of that committee's agenda one week before the meeting

Ways to advocate in support or opposition to a certain piece of legislation at the committee level include:

1. **Write to a committee member.** You have more influence if you are a constituent of the committee chair or committee member.
2. **Testify before the committee.** To testify as an individual constituent contact either the committee chair or committee clerk. As a courtesy notify your legislator that you are requesting time to present testimony.
3. **On the day of the committee meeting.** Submit a "*request to speak*" card, usually located inside the committee room and give to the committee clerk.

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Meeting with Your Legislator

You can stay in touch with your legislator in numerous ways. Legislators use their website, email and Facebook pages to keep their constituents informed. Sign up for your legislator's newsletter or other periodic updates that may be available. Facebook has become an easy communication tool for your legislator. You can sign up to be a "*fan*." Many legislators use Facebook to post their latest activities on bills that they are sponsoring, their voting position and events that they may be holding in their home district.

It can be helpful when advocating at the state level to know what committees your representative and senator are currently members of as well as any committee on which they may serve as chair. A legislator will have more influence on the outcome of a bill if they are able to work on the bill in committee.

Keep informed of when your legislator will be back in his or her home district and arrange for a meeting. If you are interested in a certain piece of legislation, come prepared with specific facts and references to support your position. Whenever possible keep your presentation short and leave a one page summary of your information.

When reaching out, include a short explanation of why you're contacting them. Consider using the SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation) format to frame your message. This approach uses your nursing tools to present a clear problem and recommendation or ask.

Contact your legislator's district office for a schedule of local events or town hall meetings that your legislator has planned. Developing a relationship with your legislator as a nursing expert can be an effective tool when advocating for specific legislation. As your legislator becomes familiar with your nursing expertise they may contact you for your professional opinion on an issue.

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Networking and Creating Alliances

Collaborating with other groups and organizations can be useful when advocating for health policy. Networking and creating alliances with organizations in your state that have a similar health policy agenda is an effective way to advocate as a member of a group. Many state nursing associations have a legislative agenda. Such groups may have an annual “Advocacy Day” at the state capitol. These organized events can facilitate meeting with your legislators to discuss nursing and health related issues.

Organizations that may be useful in providing information and updates on legislation at the state level are:

1. Your state nurses associations.
2. The National Council on State Legislatures.
<http://www.ncsl.org/>.
3. March of Dimes: www.marchofdimes.com
4. Healthy Mothers, Health Babies: www.hmhb.org
5. Maternal and Child Health Council for your state
6. The Healthy Children’s Project:
www.healthychildrenproject.org
7. Zero to Three: www.ZeroToThree.org/public_policy
8. American Association of Colleges of Nursing:
www.aacn.nche.edu/government

Agencies within your state government:

1. State Board of Nursing
2. Department of Community Health