



# NANN State Advocacy Toolkit

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## Know Your State Government

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's website 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 the home page, connect to your state's legislature or legislative branch website. Here, you will usually find links to your state's House of Representatives and Senate. You may also be able to find links to your specific state representative's and state senator's websites.
4. From your state's legislative branch website, find the link to the legislative calendar to stay informed as to when the legislature is in session. The legislative calendar link may include numerous listings such as the House and Senate schedules and links to committee meetings. When your state legislature is in recess, take the opportunity to meet with them in their districts.

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## State Legislative Websites

Your state's legislative website is a great 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's 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
  - a. House of Representative and Senate members
  - b. Committees
  - c. Calendar of events
  - d. How to contact your legislator
2. The link to bills and resolutions:
  - a. Find the language of any bill/resolution
  - b. Search for bills by sponsor, committee, etc.
  - c. View the most recent bill activity

Look for a link that allows you to sign up for "notification service" – it is usually found on the "Bills" webpage. This service will notify you by email when activity occurs on an item of interest to you. Notifications are an easy way to stay informed about bills and resolutions without having to continually check the website.

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## State Government in Action

Both the State House of Representatives and 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 a part of, and if they are committee chairs. Some of the committees that are the most influential to follow regarding nursing and maternal-child healthcare 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 a 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, especially nurses, when they are making decisions about healthcare policy. It can be useful to attend a committee hearing when a certain bill that affects the interest 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 hearing, or 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 to determine 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 can 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
  - a. Check committee calendars
  - b. Check bill activity
2. Sign up for committee meeting schedule notifications
  - a. Access the general committees' link on the legislature website
  - b. Select the committee of interest's link
  - c. Sign up for "notification of committee meeting"
  - d. You will receive an email with that committee's agenda one week before the meeting

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## Testifying Before a Committee Continued

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

- **Write to a committee member.** You have more influence if you are a constituent of the committee chair or a committee member.
- **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.
- On the day of the committee meeting, **submit a “request to speak” card**, usually located inside the committee room, and give it 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 update 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 if they chair any committees. A legislator will have more influence on the outcome of a bill if they are able to work on the bill in a committee.

Keep informed of when your legislator will be back in their 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 provide a one-page summary of your information.

## Meeting with Your Legislator Continued

When reaching out, include a short explanation as to why you are 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 similar health policy agendas are effective ways 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:

- Your state’s nursing associations
- [National Conference of State Legislatures](#)
- [March of Dimes](#)
- [Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies](#)
- Your state’s Maternal and Child Health Council
- [Healthy Children Project](#)
- [Zero to Three](#)
- [American Association of Colleges of Nursing](#)

Agencies within your state government:

- State Board of Nursing
- Department of Community Health