

THE ASNA LOBBYING PROGRAM

An aggressive lobbying program is at the heart of the Alabama State Nurses Association blueprint for success. And the stronger the grassroots influence in that effort, the more effective the lobby program will be.

TIPS FOR LOBBYING YOUR LEGISLATOR

1. *Stay informed.* Keep up to date on legislation ASNA proposes or supports, as well as bills ASNA opposes. Read *The Alabama Nurse* and other publications. Call ASNA if you have questions. When you speak with a legislator, be prepared because he/she will readily sense whether you've done your homework.
2. *Know which legislators represent the district where you live.* The Legislature has 105 members and 35 state senators elected to specific districts. If a legislator knows you vote in the district where he/she must run for reelection, the House or Senate member will pay attention when you make the contact.

If you are uncertain about your district, you may log onto the Legislature's website at www.elgislature.state.al.us and enter your zip code to locate your House and Senate member. If you have a question, you may call Senate information at (334) 242-7800 or House information at (334) 242-7600.

Under the Alabama Constitution, the Legislature meets annually and regular sessions normally start around February 1 and, by law, can run no more than 105 calendar days. Special sessions can be called by the Governor at any time and consume no more than 30 calendar days.

The Legislature meets at the Alabama Statehouse, which is located on Union Street in Montgomery, directly behind the Capitol. Lawmaker's offices also are in the Statehouse.

When the Legislature is in session, both the House and Senate normally meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Wednesdays are reserved for committees. So plan to contact legislators in Montgomery in the middle of the week and in their hometowns on Mondays and Fridays.

3. *Make the contact.* Whenever you're familiar with the ASNA legislative program and have learned how to get in touch with your legislator, proceed with your lobbying effort. Personal contact is much preferred over correspondence or email, and face-to-face is better than telephone. But make the contact in the way your schedule and circumstances allow.

By all means be courteous, because rude or impolite behavior might turn a legislator off and place ASNA's legislation in jeopardy. But make certain that you get your point across. Don't be timid; there's no need to be intimidated because the legislator works for you and wants your input as badly as you want to provide it. Ask for his/her support and tell your legislator how rewarding it is to be a part of the nursing profession and how important your profession is to society. Never neglect an opportunity to praise the medical profession.

4. *Follow up.* The goal is to develop an on-going relationship of trust with your legislator. Follow up as the legislation you are interested in makes its way through the legislative process. Offer help, whether providing research or lobbying other legislators. Contact your legislator on medical matters periodically to let him/her know your interest, whether

in support or in opposition to particular legislation. And above all, act professionally, beginning with the first contact.

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

Legislation often starts with an idea from a constituent. A nurse may be upset that a nursing home patient is not receiving proper medications, due to funding shortfalls. A teacher may complain that too much paperwork leaves too little time for instruction. A citizen may be concerned about potholes in roads or too few troopers patrolling rural highways.

Legislation also arises from governmental sources. The Governor, within the first few days of the annual session, send the Legislature budgets for operating the state government agencies and schools and colleges. State agencies propose laws which allow them to better administer their programs.

Like most states, Alabama utilized a bicameral system. The Legislature has a House and a Senate and legislation must pass through each body to become law.

The Senate, often referred to as the “Upper Chamber,” has 35 members elected from districts and is presided over by the Lieutenant Governor, elected statewide. The House has 105 members elected from districts and the speaker of the House is chosen from among those 105 members.

To be introduced, a bill must have a sponsor – any one of the 140 members. Normally, a bill will have a sponsor in each chamber.

After introduction, a bill is assigned to a committee. Each house has about 20 committees which handle legislation of a particular type. Health committees in each chamber, for instance, deal with legislation related to medical matters.

If given a favorable report by committee, the legislation is sent to the floor for debate. Approval by one house sends it to the other, where the bill is again assigned to a committee. A favorable report means the legislation is reported to the floor of the second chamber. If passed there, the bill is sent to the Governor for his/her signature to become law.

Literally hundreds of bills are introduced each year, so many pieces of legislation worthy of enactment never are taken up. The Rules Committee sets the order of debate in each house.

By design, the legislative process is lengthy, cumbersome and deliberative. Wholesome debate ostensibly results in well thought-out legislation.

Even though the deliberative process can be frustrating, it can be exiting and rewarding too. So contact your legislator and get started. And contact the Alabama State Nurses Association and ask how you can become active in the ASNA lobbying effort.

PAC – these initials stand for Political Action Committee.

Political Action Committee Definition – a committee formed by business, labor, or other special-interest groups to raise money and make contributions to the campaigns of political candidates whom they support.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. www.thefreedictionary.com

N-STAT – is the power and strength behind ANA’s (American Nurses Association) lobbyists on Capitol Hill. To join you must pay a fee. ANA’s Nurses Strategic Action Team (N-STAT) makes it easy for nurses to unite with colleagues across the nation and let lawmakers know how you feel by keeping you up to speed on key bills as they move through Congress and letting you know when your emails, phone calls and letters will make the most impact.

Resources:

www.nursingworld.org: Click on Nursing Issues/Programs (left side of page)
Click on Government Affairs – this will link you to N-STAT info.

This will also allow you to find your members of Congress (by entering your 9 digit zip code) and see how they voted on a bill.

<http://thomas.loc.gov>: Will get you into the Library of Congress and you can navigate easily through the quick links on the main page or by category.

www.alabamanurses.org: is an easy reference to get to nursingworld.org