

ARKANSAS MEDICAL SOCIETY

STAT
TEAM
TOOLKIT

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



If medicine is really to accomplish its great tasks, it must intervene in political and social life.

RUDOLF VIRDHOW



ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

Physicians are leaders in their communities, known by many people and whose opinions are respected. Do not underestimate your ability to turn those traits into positive advocacy for the profession and patient care. Your opinion and expertise as a constituent is vital in how legislative issues are decided.

The 2021 legislative landscape is already shaping up to be a challenging one for physicians, however, it's not without opportunities. To improve medicine's effectiveness in the advocacy arena, the Arkansas Medical Society created a toolkit for you to use when communicating, working, and interacting with legislators to ensure the House of Medicine's concerns on health care issues are heard.

This toolkit is designed to help you not only communicate with your legislators, but also with your peers. We need even more physicians involved to help our grassroots efforts be effective in this time of limited contact and networking that typically takes place at the Capitol during each session.

Influencing lawmakers is a team effort by members and the AMS staff, and we are thankful you have chosen to help us during the session.





PEER-TO-PEER COMMUNICATION

AMS is first asking you to reach out to your peers in the House of Medicine. Physicians of every specialty all over the state are going to come together to support one another on issues that affect all of your patients's lives. Word of mouth is still the most reliable method of communication. Don't just assume other physicians care as much as you do about an issue. In the same way you would try to persuade an elected official to see your point of view, you can lobby friends, family, and colleagues.

TIPS TO PERSUADE OTHERS TO JOIN THE FIGHT

- **Who are the most obvious supporters?** What about members of your specialty or local medical society? Peers who share your views will generally express interest in your suggestions for tips to make a difference. You will not find an advocate in every relationship you have, but by looking in your sphere of physicians, one or two advocates may come to mind who would join the fight.
- **Provide simple suggestions for new recruits to make.** Assisting with the initial piece of communication builds confidence. Refer them to this toolkit to get started.
- **Be sincere.** Be honest with your new recruit about the time and effort required to play a substantive role in political opinions.
- **What if it doesn't go your way?** Some people will not have the time, the passion, or the same interest to become involved but know that a certain amount of rejection should be expected. Do not give up and do not take the rejection personally.

WHERE TO FIND OTHER RECRUITS

- Social gatherings, political events
- County medical society meetings, specialty society meetings
- Friends and acquaintances who express similar interests
- Hospitals, offices, or clinics

NEED HELP?

Need assistance in reaching out to AMS members and non-members?

Contact Laura Haywood,
Membership and Communications Specialist at
lhaywood@arkmed.org.



EFFECTIVE LOBBYING

When lobbying legislators on certain issues, it's important to have a clear, concise strategy. Also, coordinate your efforts with the AMS Department of Government Affairs. We need to know if you have contacted some of our targeted legislators, what issues are of concern to you, and how your contact with the legislator was received. You can also review our weekly legislative update for important bills on which we need you to take action.

ALWAYS BE POLITE AND TELL THE TRUTH!

- **Don't allow your party affiliation to restrict your contact with legislators.** You may find that some issues will cross the party lines and you will need votes from those legislators who you might have thought would oppose your ideas automatically.
- **Try to start and end the conversation or letter on a positive note.** Even if the legislators cannot support your position on a particular issue, there will be other issues you may need their support on in the future.
- **Keep your comments short and to the point.** Don't be afraid to say you don't know everything about a bill. Refer the Senator or Representative to the AMS, if necessary, or tell them you will check with other sources and find out the answer to their question.
- **Follow up** with your legislators to let them know you appreciate their vote or support on a certain issue.
- **Invite your legislator to speak** at organizational meetings and local medical groups. He or she may welcome the opportunity to clarify some issues of interest to physicians.





EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH LEGISLATORS

As a physician, your professional insight must be shared with lawmakers as the work you do is increasingly affected by government regulations, legislation, and special interest groups.

Whether its through written, verbal, or social media communication, a well-crafted story is potentially the most powerful type of information you can share. Many times, legislators will recite your story to other legislators when they are championing your cause.

Real life perspectives are more interesting than cold statistics, which help legislators associate people with an issue. No matter their position on the issue, they feel an obligation to their constituent: either to help or explain why they cannot. Most legislators are interested in getting feedback from their constituents.

Below are the building blocks for telling a compelling story. We recommend keeping the story to 500 words or less, or 3-4 minutes, so that it is easier for a legislator to remember:

- Consider the end goal, know how you want the listener to feel at the conclusion of your story.
- Identify the struggles- whether emotional, financial, physical, etc. When possible, identify who is behind an issue and who is opposed to it. Legislators love to help an underdog.
- Explain what you learned from your struggle and describe how it has impacted your life, your patients' lives, your ability to practice, and your future.
- Talk about how success will enhance your practice and patient care. Finish with a strong line that will remain in the lawmaker's mind.

EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION



When organizations and individuals use social media effectively, they've been able to pressure hard-to-reach legislators, build new communities of advocates, and ultimately win on their policy issues.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT WITH LEGISLATORS

- **Study their style and plan engagement accordingly.** Familiarize yourself with the kinds of posts they typically make. Did they retweet something or tag a constituent in a post? Did they use a hashtag? Use these clues to help craft your posts and messages.
- **Tag their official handles** in any post you want them to see, which sends them a notification and will help your content stand out.
- **Include location to signal constituency.** Lawmakers prefer to engage with their own constituents, but it's hard to determine on social media where someone is from. To boost your chances of having a member engage with your content, find a way to signal that you are from their area by adding your location to your Twitter profile or adding a "constituent badge" in Facebook.
- **Keep the conversation going by asking questions.** Try responding to a post that the legislator shared with a follow-up question. If you only tag them in a comment, they may "like" your post if they agree with it, but you won't learn anything new about their policies or have an opportunity to continue the dialogue. Asking questions shows the legislator that you are reading what they are posting.
- **Follow up after your engagement.** Take the opportunity to follow-up with a letter or phone-call to engage further with your legislator. Don't let the conversation end online.



EFFECTIVE VERBAL COMMUNICATION

“Constituent-to-legislator” is the most powerful communication and there is no substitute for having a discussion about an issue with your legislator. Below are some suggestions on how to connect and talk with your lawmaker.

CHANCE MEETINGS WITH LEGISLATORS

Legislators grocery shop, attend baseball games and see their doctors in the community when they are home in their districts. Don't be afraid to intrude on their personal time. Legislators are public figures and they absolutely expect and welcome encounters with the public. Introducing yourself and speaking on a legislative issue is a great way for the lawmaker to get the pulse on the feelings from “back home.”

MAKING PHONE CALLS TO LAWMAKERS

Once you have the legislator on the phone, first identify yourself as a constituent, being polite and courteous. Briefly state your position (whether opposing or supporting a piece of legislation) and stay on-message.

Remember to request a response, and leave your email address and phone number to ensure a degree of accountability. Thank them for their time and remember to follow up with a letter and any information they requested or that you promised.



EFFECTIVE VERBAL COMMUNICATION

FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

While COVID may have reduced the number of face-to-face meetings at the Capitol, you can still reach out for personal meetings to establish rapport, especially when the legislature is not in session. You can call and arrange an appointment or invite the legislator to your clinic or facility. It can even be as simple as inviting them to coffee. Introduce yourself, stating where you live and that you are a physician in the district. We do not recommend the first time you meet your legislator be the first time you call to encourage a vote on a certain bill.

When meeting with your legislator and discussing your issues, here are some tips to guide you through your visit and conversation:

- **Get to know them ahead of time.** Do a little research to find which committees the legislator meets with and if they have any connection to your issue or your field. Have they engaged in other legislative matters pertinent to your issue? Can you discover other community activities that may open communications such as civic clubs, sports, etc.
- **Be familiar with your issue.** Thoughtful and knowledgeable awareness of all the factors is critical to establishing that you are an expert on your issue.
- **Have a specific “ask.”** Specific requests with a no/yes option create a metric the legislator can be measured by. It is helpful if you explain both sides of the issue and why your position is the best. Ask for a commitment and listen for the response.
- **Thank them for their time.** Send a follow-up correspondence or provide any requested materials.
- **Provide feedback to AMS Governmental Affairs.** It is essential advocates and your lobbyist have close coordination on the efforts made regarding the issues. Lobbyists can remind legislators of their constituents' concerns if they begin to waiver.
- **Follow up.** Even if the legislator promised to call you in a week, the responsibility falls on the advocate to follow up. When you call and follow-up, you essentially tell the legislator that you are not going anywhere.

EFFECTIVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

When writing to your legislator, you will want to ensure the letter properly addresses the lawmaker with the correct title and salutation. A typed or legibly handwritten letter, either emailed or mailed, is acceptable. Below are do's and don'ts when writing your legislator.

The tips below will ensure your email or letter contains a well-written, concise argument.

- Make your name and address visible so they will know you are a constituent. Include additional contact information.
- **First Paragraph - Who you are and your standing.** Emails from people who are most affected by the policy or have knowledge of its impact are the most likely to influence legislators.
- **Second Paragraph - Your personal story.** Tell your compelling story using both emotion and fact. Personalize with a story from your life, your community, or your professional expertise. Remember to stay on topic.
- **Third paragraph - Your specific ask.** Be as precise as possible with your request. Some examples may be, "Please go to the House floor and speak on behalf of this policy," or "Please sponsor this bill."
- **Fourth paragraph - Use Local Data.** Legislators rely heavily on accurate information that will impact their constituency when considering proposed legislation and have little time to research all of the issues before them. Try conducting an informal survey of 10 constituent physicians on the issue at hand and relay those findings to your legislator.
- **Fifth paragraph - Describe Your Passion.** Your enthusiasm reflects in this paragraph when you say why you are supporting or not supporting the measure before them.
- **IMPORTANT: Proofread for errors** ensuring your message is concise and brief. For letters, it should stay within a two-page maximum.
- **Send a copy to AMS Governmental Affairs** team at ssmith@arkmed.org.





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