



Making the **CONNECTION**

Guide to Physician and Legislative Affairs



Pennsylvania
MEDICAL SOCIETY[®]

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Scan the QR codes in this guide to watch videos from your legislative affairs team on important topics!



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Watch a quick video to learn more about how physicians like you can play a vital role in the legislative process!

I. The Role of a Pennsylvania Physicians

Before you can fully understand your role as a physician advocate, you must first understand its importance. In state legislatures across the country and in Washington D.C., special interest groups are vying for the attention of their elected representatives. When your U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, Congressman/Congresswoman, State Senator, or State Representative is faced with a divisive issue that will have a direct impact on his or her constituency, they rely on experts like you for knowledgeable input and guidance. **Nothing is more important than the views of constituents.** Don't ever be misled to believe that your collective opinions, if properly voiced, do not make a difference.

The Pennsylvania Medical Society (PAMED) is considered by most political operatives to be major "player" in helping to shape public health care policy in Pennsylvania. It is important that you know that your "special interest" is a respected part of the political process. However, without the support of physician advocates like you, efforts to positively impact the legislative process would prove difficult. Your participation in the legislative process as a physician advocate is vital.... don't underestimate your own personal influence!

In representing the interests of the medical community, it is important for you to remember that your input on critical issues is based upon personal experience in medicine. As a physician, you know first-hand the obstacles that you encounter in your everyday practice. You uniquely understand the needs and desires of your patients. And, most importantly, you are the only one who knows what is best for the health and welfare of those who seek your care. After all, you are the one on the front lines of health care!

In both instances, your role as a physician advocate is to serve as an effective communicator to your elected representatives. Although on the surface it may appear to be a simple task, many professionals serving in this same capacity, i.e., lobbyists, spend entire careers developing effective communication skills. Equally important in becoming an effective physician advocate is your personal involvement in your representative's career. That is, volunteer to campaign on their behalf, offering to hold fundraisers in your home, and personally contributing to their campaign fund.

A physician advocate's role in the legislative process is truly multifaceted. This guide is designed to help you to develop new skills and hopefully sharpen and enhance existing ones.

Why should I take the time to act when I receive a call to action from PAMED?

PAMED's lobbyists have insider information on when bills are expected to run, and how particular legislators are expected to vote. When you get a call to action from PAMED, it's because the physician voice needs to be heard among legislators on a particular issue. Although personal phone calls are one of the most effective tools a physician advocate can use, you can also be an effective advocate through email. Though we often provide a templated message for you to send, it is a lot more impactful if you customize your message with your own experiences and thoughts on the issue. If you have a story about how the issue has personally impacted you or your patients – share it! Personal stories are very impactful when it comes to communicating with legislators.



**Watch now
to learn how
to get to
know your
legislators!**

II. Getting to Know Your Legislator

While developing a good relationship with your representatives is not something that is easily attained, having that kind of relationship can result in your ability to influence the decision making process. Unfortunately, legislators aren't going to be influenced by someone he or she hardly knows, seldom sees, or who only contacts him or her on issues of personal interest.

It is important for physician advocates to understand the pressures that exist in holding public office and the need for legislators to be responsive to various constituencies.

Know your legislator politically!

It is very helpful to learn about the legislator's background, goals, areas of interest, and sphere of influence within the General Assembly, including:

- When they first were elected
- What other elected positions they've held
- What occupation they practiced before entering public service
- What types of legislation they have authored
- On which committees they serve
- What issues do they seem most concerned about
- If organized medicine financially supported their campaign

Get to know your legislator personally.

In addition to knowing your legislator's political history, you should also get to know them on a more personal basis. It never hurts to know such things about their:

- Family, how many children, is their spouse employed, etc.
- Hobbies and recreational interests
- Community involvement
- Educational background

Know the demographics of the electoral district.

To better understand your legislators and the issues they support, carefully look at what constituency that legislator represents. An understanding of your representative's district becomes necessary when the politics of a given topic is raised. Having this knowledge demonstrates your interest in the political process. In analyzing the demographics of a legislative district, it is always great to familiarize yourself with such factors as:



- Average voting age, population mix
- Voting patterns of the young and elderly
- General economic status of the communities
- Major interest groups, i.e., labor unions, business groups, etc.
- Health status of the general citizenry
- Traditional base of political support and opposition

How can I get to know my legislators?

- Visit their website
- Check out their social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.)
- Schedule a meeting with them to introduce yourself

III. Effectively Communicating with Legislators

Personal Visits

Make a special effort to visit with your legislators when they are in the district. This may include specific visits to their district office by appointment or informal interactions during social or civic gatherings. It is also a good idea to periodically arrange for a small group of physicians to meet with your legislator to discuss matters of mutual concern and interest. These types of meetings provide an excellent opportunity to introduce to your elected officials those people in the medical community who are actively involved in health care related issues.

Not unlike most individuals, legislators' receptivity to the viewpoints of organized medicine falls into one of three categories.

- 1. They are philosophically in agreement.** These individuals should not be taken for granted. Continue to keep them updated with the latest medical developments or strategies. Remember, this type of legislator can sometimes be counted on to generate additional support among their colleagues.
- 2. They philosophically disagree with organized medicine.** These individuals cannot be ignored simply because of their predisposition on health care issues. They must also be kept apprised of important medical issues and made aware of what effect various policies will have on their constituents. Remember, it is important to eliminate the opportunity for your representative to say, "I never hear from the physicians in my community."
- 3. They are undecided.** This is likely to be the most common of the three groups. These individuals will need to be not only convinced on the substance of your arguments, but also on the political considerations. Legislators falling into this category can be challenging, but also rewarding. It is with this group that issues are won or lost!



Want to learn more about how to effectively communicate with your legislator? Watch this video!

Despite the possible differences in the issues, there are some general principles that you can apply when talking with your legislators.

- **Be prepared!** Do your homework and know ahead of time what issues you plan to discuss. Anticipate other related issues that may arise as a result of your meeting. It is a good idea to read the representative's most recent newsletter or check out their social media channels if they have them prior to your visit.
- **Establish a proper tone for the meeting.** Avoid beginning your meeting with a list of complaints or arguments about your issues. Rather, begin by establishing a common denominator. If it is appropriate, make reference to mutual friends, interests, or activities in the community. Allow the first few minutes of your meeting to consist of issues unrelated to your purpose. For instance, "How are things in Washington?" or "What's the hot topic in Harrisburg?" Treat the legislator as you'd like to be treated upon first meeting with someone you do not know. You get the idea.
- **Be concise, specific, and clear.** After opening your meeting, refer to the purpose of your visit. Remember, your representative's time is valuable, and that the length of these visits vary. So, make the most of what time you have. Offer your information as clearly as possible and be specific. Indicate your willingness to keep their office apprised of your issue as changes develop.
- **Be reasonable.** Avoid overstating your point as we don't want you to risk losing your credibility. If their opinion differs from yours, take time to listen to their concerns. Be cognizant that your representative may not be familiar with medical terminology. Discuss these issues as you would with a patient. Aim to partner with the legislator, and do not use condescending language.
- **Localize the issue.** In discussing broad sweeping issues, focus on how the legislative proposal will impact the daily lives of your patients, their constituents. It is imperative that your representative understands that policies that address one portion of the state may have a different effect on their constituents. Humanize the issue beyond the national and state cost figures.
- **Acknowledge the opposition...**But don't denigrate them! You should become familiar with the arguments being used by your opponents and logically express what you believe to be their weaknesses. Acknowledge the political realities of the issue. Remember, there are always two sides to a divisive issue.
- **Provide written materials.** Before ending your meeting, be sure to provide your representative or appropriate staff with your business card and a brief summary of the issue that you discussed. This summary should be a one-page overview.
- **Thank you and follow-up.** Be sure to thank your representative for their time and encourage them to call you if any questions arise. Be sure to follow-up your visit with a letter, card, or email of appreciation and briefly summarize the points you outlined in your meeting. Send a copy of your communication to your lobbyists at PAMED so they can be aware of your contact. You may also want to discuss the outcome of your meeting.



Telephone Contacts

Through the course of your relationship with your representative, there may be times that contacts via telephone provides the best alternative. As you may know, the political tide changes very quickly and provides little “lead time” to effectively react. These situations are best handled with a quick phone call.

If you have already established a good relationship, your chances of being directly connected with your representative are vastly improved. However, never pass up the opportunity to voice your concerns to a staff person. These individuals often have the confidence of their boss and can positively affect what vote is cast. If you feel that it is important for you to also speak with the representative, express your desire as courteously as possible. Ask when it might be convenient for you to call back or offer a phone number where you can be reached at the convenience of the legislator.

As always, try to inform the PAMED’s lobbyists of your discussions. This exchange of information is beneficial in the event your representative contacts PAMED for further information.

Written Correspondence

Although not as effective as personal visits or phone calls, written correspondence can be effective if properly executed. Some quick points to remember when writing to your representative:

- Personal letters can be very impactful, and are much more effective than an email. Ideally letters should be type written. If not, handwritten correspondence must be legible.
- Be sure to use the appropriate address and salutation.
- Be polite, reasonable, and on point. Cover only one issue per correspondence.
- In closing your correspondence, be certain to acknowledge your appreciation.
- If possible, take time to hand-write a short note at the bottom of the letter to further personalize a letter.

It is always a good idea to follow up a personal visit or phone call with a brief note of thanks. Additionally, use a personal letter as a means of providing resource information that may not have been previously available. In all cases, written communications should adhere to the same guidelines as personal contacts.



The following sample salutations should help you in properly addressing your written correspondence.

State Senate or House Member

Honorable John Doe
Senate (House) Post Office
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Senator (Representative) Doe:

Governor or Lt. Governor

Honorable John Doe
Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, Pa 17120

Dear Governor Doe:

US Senator

Honorable John Doe, U.S.S.
(Office Address)
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Doe:

US Congressman

Honorable John Doe, M.C.
(Office Address)
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Doe:

Social media

Don't forget about social media. Check out your legislators' pages on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social media platforms. Tag them in posts that have to do with physician issues. This helps educate them and raise awareness on important topics. When they vote in our favor on physician issues, make sure to thank and tag them on social media as well.

IV. The Importance of Legislative Staff

Legislators are required to deal with a multitude of issues ranging from agriculture to complex tax codes. As a result, it is nearly impossible for your representative to be familiar with every facet of health care. Therefore, as a physician advocate, you should take time to acquaint yourself with your representative's legislative staff.

Legislative staffers are excellent allies. Since they are generally more focused on specific issues, you will often find them familiar with the complexities of the health care delivery system. Furthermore, their advice and counsel is sought regularly, providing them with a great deal of influence over how your representative votes.

As with any legislative contact, be concise, on point, and discuss one issue at a time. Remember to follow up your meeting with a note of appreciation and any additional materials that you may have promised to forward. If you make an effort to cultivate a good working relationship with the staff, your influence will be greatly enhanced.



Don't underestimate the power of legislative staff! Watch this video to learn why.



V. The Politics of the Legislative Process

By now you should have an understanding of how to develop relationships with your representative. One aspect of this process, which has not yet been discussed, the politics of the legislative process.

How your representative votes may sometimes depend on the politics of that particular issue. Understanding these intricate relationships requires a broad knowledge of the issue and a certain degree of experience. There is one way to “break through” the political barrier that will catapult you to new heights of political influence...**campaign financing.**

In today’s political climate it appears that Political Action Committees (PAC’s) rule the hallways of capitol hill. Yes, PACs do play an important role in the legislative process. But, more important is the financial support from constituents who contribute to their legislator or financially support candidates for public office. Once you have developed a strong relationship with your representative, maintain that bond by personally contributing to their campaign committee. If you wish to increase your level of involvement without necessarily increasing your contributions, volunteer to work on a campaign. Help stuff envelopes, make phone calls, or go door to door with the candidate.

The key contact wishing to achieve the ultimate level of involvement is one who contributes personally to a campaign, serves as a volunteer on the campaign trail, and organizes fundraising events from area physicians. Although a great deal of time must be sacrificed to serve in this capacity, the dividends are immeasurable. This level of commitment is truly commendable.



Meet the
PAMED
legislative
affairs team
in this video!

VI. PAMED Staff Resources

Throughout this guide, there are a number of references to providing legislators with background information on key legislative issues. As a physician advocate, you are not expected to prepare this type of information every time you wish to visit your representative. Rather, all you need to do is call our toll-free number at 800-228-7823 and request whatever information you feel is appropriate for your visit.

PAMED’s Governmental Affairs staff is prepared to provide you with all the necessary information you may need when meeting with a legislator. Staff can “fill you in” on such important points as the status of a bill, the players involved on that particular issue, and perhaps give you some insight on the disposition of your legislator. We can also provide talking points to help you feel comfortable in your conversation with a legislator. In fact, if you plan to visit your representative while they are in Harrisburg or Washington, arrangements can even be made to have one of the PAMED’s lobbyists accompany you.

In any event, PAMED’s lobbying staff is dedicated to ensuring that your communication and advocacy efforts with legislators is as effective and productive as possible.



For information on how to become more involved in the politics of the legislative process, contact the Governmental Affairs staff of the Pennsylvania Medical Society at 1-800-228-7823.

Inquiries regarding this guide should also be directed to the Governmental Affairs staff.