



# Legislative Day

## *Strategies for Success*

Legislative day is a day of advocacy for the profession of pharmacy! It is an excellent opportunity to meet with your legislators to talk about issues impacting pharmacists and provide insight into the practice of pharmacy from the perspective of a new practitioner. Your outreach will be the first step in building an ongoing relationship with legislators and their staff and will go a long way towards boosting ASHP's advocacy efforts.

## Get Started

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Organizing a legislative day requires planning and organization. Below is a detailed schedule of planning activities to help you prepare for a successful event.

### **8 WEEKS PRIOR TO "LEGISLATIVE DAY"**

- Consider coordinating the legislative day with your state affiliate organization and ask for help with goal setting activities.
- Involve pharmacy students from the colleges of pharmacy in the state. Fostering early involvement in advocacy events helps foster lifelong involvement in advocacy activities. Set up carpools or ask the school to donate a bus for transportation to the state capital.
- Organize a health screening activity for the legislators for more opportunities to discuss the expanding role of pharmacists in hospitals and health-systems. Example activities include blood pressure checks, diabetes screening, or a "brown bag" medication review.
- Research your state capitol's schedule and see if health care related legislation is being considered and try to plan the event on or around this time.
- Submit letters to state legislators to request a meeting. If a meeting with state legislators cannot be made, request to meet with the key health legislative assistant. A sample appointment letter is available on the Advocacy Toolkit main page.
- Be sure to follow-up by phone within five business days of sending the initial letter. Mention your letter and re-invite the legislator and staff.
- Draft a document indicating your "take away message" and identify the key issues. This document can be used to brief your attendees and also serve as leave behind material for the legislators. Look to ASHP's advocacy agenda and Issue Statements on the Advocacy Toolkit main page for background information, sample itinerary, and additional resources to help you select your advocacy strategy.

- Draft an itinerary for the visit.

## 2 WEEKS PRIOR TO “LEGISLATIVE DAY”

- By now, the event date and time should be confirmed. It is important to provide the legislator’s district office with a list of attendees and the proposed itinerary for the day.
- Put together an informational packet with background information and handouts for the legislators to take back with them.
- Plan to meet a few days before the event to brief all attendees on the main “take away message.” Practice discussing key legislative issues with each other before meeting with the legislator. This will allow your group to have a common voice and will have a greater impact on the legislators and their staff.

## Tips and Tricks for Legislative Day

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**RELAX.** If this is your first time going to the State Capitol to advocate for your profession, it is natural to be a bit nervous. But don’t worry! Your Legislative Day visit will be productive and enjoyable if you remember a few simple key points.

### BEFORE THE MEETING BEGINS:

**Choose a "team leader."** Having a "leader" will ensure that the meeting runs smoothly and efficiently. If there are individuals who have past experience meeting with legislators, you may want to let them “take the lead” for the initial interaction until you feel more comfortable. Your state affiliate organization can provide you with leaders that have with experience meeting with legislators.

**Be on time.** A general rule is to **allow 15 minutes to get from one place to the other.** But don't panic if you are a bit late! Members and staff understand that you are running around trying to make the most of your visit to the State Capitol. However, if you are going to be more than a few minutes late, call the office and let them know.

**Be prepared to be kept waiting and be flexible.** Legislators and their staff can be incredibly busy and schedules may change at the last minute. A meeting scheduled with the legislator may switch to a meeting with the staff. And that’s okay! Remember that meeting with staff is often more productive than meeting directly with the Legislator because staff often advise the legislators on how to vote on key issues. And of course, the meeting may be canceled outright.

If this happens, offer your business card and the informational packet and ask that they be given to the legislator's health staff.

**Expect a "short and sweet" meeting, so BE PREPARED!** Although some staff may have time for lengthier visits, expect to have **no more than thirty minutes** with Legislators or their staff. That means that you must act fast to make your mark. Such a limited amount of time does not allow for in-depth discussions of all of your key issues. If you were to try to pack in several issues in such a short time, your message would likely be garbled or instantly forgotten. That's why we suggest that you **KEEP IT SIMPLE**. The most important goal to accomplish is to be sure the Legislator and/or staff walks away from the meeting with a clear understanding of **what a "health-system pharmacist" does**. Discussions of specific legislative issues will have little impact if your audience does not understand why the issues are important to you and how they may impact your practice!

#### **AT THE START OF THE MEETING:**

**Offer your business card.** This helps the person(s) you are meeting with remember your name(s).

**Allow the "team leader" to get the meeting started.** The leader should begin by thanking the Legislator/staff for taking time to meet with the group. The leader may start the meeting by summarizing what a health-system pharmacist is, so that the Legislator/staff will understand the role health-system pharmacists play, as distinguished from retail or community pharmacists, for example. **Point their attention to the brochure that provides a visual explanation of the role of a health-system pharmacist.** This will be a useful and meaningful tool in your discussion.

#### **DURING THE "HEART" OF THE MEETING:**

**Move to a discussion of the main message.** The leader may wish to say something like, "We know you have a very busy schedule, we would like to take a moment to focus on one specific issue we as a profession of pharmacy is particularly concerned with. Other members of the group should add to the discussion with examples. **Be personal and give specific examples.**

**Always keep the tone of the meeting positive.** You may encounter some Legislators/staff who disagree with your views. Although they may challenge you, try not to be defensive, and never argue. Always be respectful of "the other side," and be willing to agree to disagree. Reinforce that your number-one concern is patient care.

**If you don't know the answer to a question, offer to find the answer and follow-up.** It is perfectly understandable to not know the answer to a question you may be asked. Try to follow-up as soon as possible following the meeting.

#### **AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEETING:**

**Thank the individual(s)** for their time and offer to serve as a resource on health-related issues. It is also appropriate to invite the Legislator/staff to tour your practice site.

**Direct attention to the "leave-behind" material.**

**Ask for a business card.** If the staff person has not already offered one, be sure to get a card. This makes follow-up communication much easier.

#### **AT THE END OF THE DAY:**

**HAVE FUN!** Remember -- YOU are the expert. You are also a constituent and you vote. You have a right to meet with your representatives and express your interests or concerns regarding certain issues. You are also part of an elite minority of Americans who take the time to have their voice heard on Capitol Hill. We hope you will enjoy your day.

## **After Legislative Day**

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#### **IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING "LEGISLATIVE DAY"**

- Send a follow-up thank you letter immediately after the event thanking the legislator and staff for their time. Include any photos from the event. The letter should include important points from your legislator meeting. A sample thank you letter is available for you on the Advocacy Toolkit main page.
- Send a thank you note to all of the attendees, including the state affiliate, for participating in the event. Include any photos from the event.