



ASPAN

American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses

GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS TOOLKIT

Prepared By:

**ASPAN's Governmental
Affairs Strategic Work
Team**





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American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses



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Introduction

The Governmental Affairs Strategic Work Team (GA SWT) serves to position the American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses (ASPAN) as a key voice in legislative and health policy development. The GA SWT monitors legislation, governmental regulations, and administrative actions that impact nursing and healthcare.

Advocacy is a natural extension of nursing practice. By using the same skills, you use every day – communication, critical thinking, and relationship–building – perianesthesia nurses can influence both state and federal policy. Every nurse has a role in shaping the future of healthcare. A strong understanding of the legislative process helps ensure:

- Adequate funding for nursing workforce development
- Affordable, equitable access to high–quality care
- Removal of barriers preventing advanced practice nurses from practicing
- to the full extent of their training
- Support for evidence–based care and research

This Toolkit is designed to equip you with practical tools and strategies to become an effective advocate, ensuring your voice is heard in the policy–making process.





“I Am a Nurse – Why Do I Need to Know About Politics?”

Because you cannot afford NOT to be involved!

Almost every day, Congress and state legislators make decisions that directly affect nursing practice, healthcare delivery, and patient outcomes. As the largest group of healthcare professionals and consistently ranked as the most trusted profession,¹ nurses have a strong voice in shaping health policy.²

Nurses bring clinical expertise, leadership, and firsthand knowledge of healthcare issues to the table– insights most legislators simply do not have. Your perspective is not only valuable but also essential in helping elected governmental officials make informed decisions.

Getting involved in the political process, whether at the local, state, or national level, empowers you to drive meaningful change. Your voice matters. Your expertise matters. Your advocacy can shape the future of nursing practice and healthcare.





Where to Begin

The first step in political activism is becoming informed about issues and matters of legislation. There are a number of ways you can become more knowledgeable and gain confidence. The following are some suggestions to get you started:

- **Explore ASPAN's Governmental Affairs (GA) resources** – Visit the ASPAN [Governmental Affairs webpage](#) for tools, information, and useful links tailored to perianesthesia nurses.
- **Engage with professional organizations** – Check out the websites of professional nursing and healthcare organizations (see the list on ASPAN's GA webpage).
- **Stay informed on current events** – Follow local and national news to keep up with policy changes and emerging issues.
- **Subscribe and connect** – Read journals and newsletters from professional nursing organizations, sign up for government affairs and policy updates, and follow these groups on social media.
- **Learn the legislative process** – Familiarize yourself with how laws are made and how you can influence them.
- **Know your legislators** – Identify your representatives and monitor their voting records on healthcare-related issues. Attend public forums such as town halls and hearings.
- **Build relationships** – Invite legislators to speak at component conferences and engage in dialogue.
- **Participate in advocacy events** – Attend Nurses' Day or other legislative activities (Hill Day) at local, state, and national levels.



The Legislative Process

There are several stages in the legislative process that present opportunities to impact the outcome of a bill. Armed with the knowledge of how the system works, you can better understand ways to make your voice heard and when the appropriate time to take action presents itself.

Anyone may draft a bill, but only a sitting member of the Senate or Congress may introduce it for legislative action. A bill might start with a citizen's demand for action. If the citizen brings their issue/concern with all necessary supporting documentation to their senator or congressional representative, and that legislator deems the issue worthy of elevating it to the legislative process, the legislator may choose to sponsor the initiative and draft a bill. Pertinent issues can also be promoted by a special interest group and then sponsored by a legislator. Other originators of bills include members of Congress, coalitions, legislative committees, and the President.³

Step 1: Introduction

Only members of Congress or the Senate can introduce legislation. Once introduced, the congressperson(s) or senator(s) behind the legislation become its sponsor(s). There are four basic types of legislation: bills, joint resolutions, concurrent resolutions, and simple resolutions. The official legislative process begins when a bill or resolution is introduced and assigned a number in the order in which it is received. Bills introduced in the Congress (House of Representatives) begin with the designation of "H.R.," signifying that it originates in the House of Representatives. Bills introduced in the Senate begin with the designation "S." for a Senate bill.



For example, the first bill introduced during the House of Representatives' 119th session would be H.R.1 in the 119th session of Congress. If a bill does not become law during the session it is introduced, it must be reintroduced during the next session, given a new number to start the process again.³

Step 2: Committee

Bills and resolutions are then referred to the appropriate committee(s) in the Congress or Senate, depending on where they were introduced. Once in committee, if the legislation is considered significant, hearings may be held with content experts, lobbyists, and agency officials.³

Step 3: Committee Hearings and Action

When a bill reaches a committee, it is reviewed in detail. During the committee phase of review, changes to a bill are made in the form of amendments. Although most legislation never makes it out of the committee review phase, if the committee views the bill favorably, a committee report may be issued describing the purpose and scope of the legislation, along with any amendments made during review. Once approved by the considering committee, it moves forward in the legislative process. Committees may reject bills by failing to act on them, which means they “die in committee.”³

Step 4: Subcommittee Review

A bill can be referred to a subcommittee for study and hearings. Hearings provide the opportunity to record the views held by the government, other public officials, industry experts, supporters, and opponents of the legislation. Testimony can be given in person or submitted as a written statement. Notice of hearings and instructions for providing testimony are published in the Federal Register.³



Step 5: Mark Up

If a subcommittee reports a bill back to the full committee, they may make changes to or amend the bill in the form of amendments first. This phase of legislative processes is referred to as the “markup” process. If a subcommittee votes not to report legislation to the full committee, the bill is not sent to the full committee for a vote and is no longer in process for passage.³

Step 6: Committee Action – Reporting a Bill

After receiving a subcommittee’s report on a bill, the full committee can conduct further study and hearings, or it can vote on the committee’s recommendations for passage. If the legislation passes through the debate and vote of the committee of one chamber, it is sent to the other chamber (House or Senate) for debate and vote. This procedure is called “ordering a bill reported. The report presents the content and purpose of the bill as well as describing the amendments made in committee, and the potential impact it may have to changing existing laws.”³

Step 7: Publication of Committee Report

After the bill is reported, a report is written and published. The report presents the content and purpose of the bill, describes the amendments made in committee, and outlines the potential impact it may have on existing laws. This report can also describe any budgetary considerations to be introduced, such as new taxes or increased taxes required to fund the bill. The report typically includes transcripts from public hearings as well as the opinions of the committee for and against the proposed bill.^{3,4}



**Step 8: Floor Action – Legislative Calendar**

Once the bill is reported out by the committee, it will be placed on the legislative calendar of the House or Senate and is scheduled in chronological order for debate and a vote. The House maintains several calendars; the Speaker and Majority Leader determine whether and when bills are placed on the calendar and the order in which bills are discussed. The Senate has only one legislative calendar.³

Step 9: Debate

When a bill reaches the floor of the full House or Senate, strict rules for consideration and debate are followed.³

Step 10: Voting

After the debate and the approval of any amendments, the full membership of the legislative chamber will vote to determine the fate of the bill by voice or roll call vote.³

Step 11: Referral to Second Chamber

When a bill is passed by the House or the Senate, it is referred to the other chamber, where it usually follows the same route through committee and floor action. This chamber may approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or amend it.³

Step 12 Conference Committee

If significant changes are made to a bill in the second chamber, and there are two different versions passed in the House and Senate, a conference committee is formed consisting of members from each chamber. This newly formed committee then works to reach a compromise bill by reconciling the differences between the House and Senate versions.



If the conferees are unable to reach an agreement, the legislation dies. If agreement is reached, a conference report is prepared describing the committee members' recommendations for changes. Both the House and the Senate must approve the conference report or return it to the conference committee for further work.^{3,4}

Step 13: Final Action – Enrollment

Throughout the legislative approval process, the president may issue messages recommending or approving specific amendments or actions to be added or deleted from the bill. After a bill has been approved by both the House and Senate in identical form, it becomes enrolled and is sent to the President, who can approve or veto it and may add approval or veto statements. If the President approves of the legislation, he signs it, and it becomes law. If the President takes no action in 10 days while Congress is in session, it automatically becomes law. If the President opposes the bill, he can veto it. If he takes no action after the Congress has adjourned its second session, the bill dies. This is considered a pocket veto.^{3,4}

Step 14: Overriding a Veto

If the President vetoes a bill, Congress may attempt to “override the veto” with a two-thirds majority vote by a quorum of members present in the Senate and the House. If the two-thirds voting majority is reached, the bill becomes law.³

The Regulatory Process

After a law is passed, it is sent to a particular federal agency in the executive branch responsible for writing regulations to implement the law and guide individuals on how to comply with it. These regulations establish the specifics of how the law will be carried out. The regulatory process provides an opportunity for interested parties to contribute to the development of regulations but may be influenced by the political agenda of the executive branch.³



Federal Budget and Appropriations

Each year, Congress and the President begin a yearlong process to establish spending levels for different areas of government. Most budget decisions are made annually through the enactment of appropriations bills. The Congressional Budget Act of 1974 established a process called the congressional budget resolution which was implemented to allow congress to establish and enforce a yearly plan to act on the existing budget. Over the years and presently, this process has become obsolete and is largely ignored by Congress.⁵

The two basic federal spending categories are mandatory and discretionary. Nearly two-thirds of the federal budget is allocated to mandatory spending, which is required by law. Mandatory spending allocations include programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Social Security, veterans' disability compensation, and federal military and civilian retirement. Approximately one-third of the budget is for discretionary spending. For discretionary funds, the law establishes the program or agency but does not determine funding levels. Examples of discretionary funding include defense, medical care for veterans, operating budgets for civilian agencies, and medical and scientific research. Nursing Workforce Development Programs, National Institutes of Health, and National Institute of Nursing Research are included in the annual discretionary budget planning. Since these items are considered discretionary, the amount that is allocated to fund them may vary from year to year. Hence, discretionary spending is often a source of considerable interest and lobbying.⁵

The President submits their proposed budget to Congress on the first Monday in February. This document is a political "blueprint" that provides the sitting Congress with guidelines for the President's preferred spending allocations.



It is not binding and is considered a formal request to Congress. The budget request is developed through an interactive process between federal agencies and the President's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that begins in the spring of the prior year.^{5,6}

Congressional Budget Process

The President's budget outlines the priorities of the administration for federal spending for the upcoming fiscal year, which runs from October 1 to September 30.⁷ The budget resolution is adopted when the House and Senate pass an identical measure. This may be accomplished by negotiation of a conference agreement, or one chamber passes the resolution adopted by the other. Congress should pass the budget resolution by April 15 to be effective at the start of the fiscal year, October 1.⁵

Appropriations

The budget resolution is divided among the 12 appropriations committees for the distribution of funds for various government functions. The appropriations bills must be passed by Congress and signed by the President before the end of the current fiscal year. If this deadline is not met, a continuing resolution may be enacted to maintain government funding at previous levels. Congress must approve a continuing resolution (CR). This must be signed by the President and serves as a stopgap for funding of affected agencies and programs.⁵ The federal budget process is complex and frequently impacted by political contention and delays, contributing to missed deadlines and reliance on temporary funding actions. Without Congress passing a continuing resolution or the President's signature, programs and agencies that rely on annual appropriations essentially shut down operations.^{5,7}



What's Next – Getting Involved

Vote!

Exercising your right to vote is the most important action you can take to become involved in the political process. Voting is your responsibility as a U.S. citizen! Legislation at the local, state, and federal level impacts healthcare services and affects the role and future of nursing. There are more than four and half million nurses in the United States. Nurses have the expertise to impact healthcare policy, but this potential cannot be realized unless each nurse takes the steps to register and vote.⁸

Communicating with Your Legislators

The most effective way to communicate with your legislator is with a personal visit. There is the option of meeting them at their capital office or their local office within the districts they serve. A second option is to call your legislator. Some offices have aides that will speak with you and listen to your concerns. Some offices have voicemail set up to record concerns of their constituents. Corresponding with your legislator through an email or letter is another option. The key with correspondence is to make sure it is personalized. A signed form letter does not have the same impact as a message thoughtfully written.





General Tips⁹

- Be respectful– Address the legislator by their title (Senator, Representative, etc.)
- Stay focused– Focus on the issue. Do not engage in politics.
- Be concise– Use brief, clear language. Focus on key messages.
- Use everyday language– Avoid medical jargon and abbreviations.
- Use personal stories– Connect key points and facts with a brief personal story. State the consequences that have occurred due to a piece of legislation. Legislation is hard to ignore when you put a face to it.
- Remember the ask– Clearly state the action you are asking the legislator to take. This is an important step in communicating with legislators, but it is often forgotten.
- Reinforce key messages, facts, and your ask– Repeat your key points, facts, and the ask multiple times to both the legislator and their staff.
- Thank You– Thank the legislator and their staff for their time and their attention.

Meeting with Your Legislators or Legislative Staff⁹

- Be on time, be concise, and know what you want to say– Your time with the legislator will be limited. Be prepared to share your key points and personal story within a few minutes. This will allow time for the legislator to ask questions and engage in the conversation.
- Bring supplemental materials– Prepare a one–page summary with important facts and a clear ask. Leave the document with the legislator or his staff.
- Go with a friend or colleague– It may be easier to attend the meeting with a colleague. Another nurse who understands the issue can add value to the conversation. Limit the number in attendance at the meeting to four.



Be Prepared for a Conversation

- Research and understand the issue. If a bill has been introduced concerning the issue, refer to the bill by name and number.
- Review your legislator's website. Learn where they stand on issues and which committees they sit on. Review how they have voted on past legislation.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, be honest. Let the legislator or staff member know you are willing to obtain the information they requested. Verify the best way to follow up with them concerning the information they requested.

Embrace the Legislative Staff Members

You may not be able to meet with the legislator personally. An aide for the legislator often meets with constituents. The legislative staff are often the ones who research and have a more in-depth understanding of the issue than the legislator. This can be an opportunity to educate and engage the staff. They can be your messenger.

Follow Up

Send a thank you email to the legislator and staff with whom you met within 48 hours of the meeting. Include additional information that may have been requested, as well as answers to any follow-up questions. Again, remind the legislator and staff of the ask, and what action you wish them to take.

Telephone Calls⁹

1. Identify yourself– State that you are a constituent, registered voter and a registered nurse.
2. Identify the issue or bill– Let the staff know what issue or bill you want to discuss. Identify the bill specifically by name and number. Legislative staff typically answer these calls.
3. State your position on the issue or bill and what action you are asking your legislator to take– Be concise and factual. If you are unsure of the legislator's position, ask.



4. Provide key messages and facts – Include a brief personal story, if possible, to make your message more impactful.
5. Leave your contact information – This allows staff to follow up with questions or share the legislator’s response.
6. Thank You – Thank the legislator and office staff for their time and attention to your concern.
7. Follow Up– Email the staff member you spoke to and provide any additional information that was requested. Remind them of the ask, the action you wish the legislator to take. Again, thank them for their time and consideration.

Emails and Letters⁹

1. Use appropriate headings and salutations– Address the legislator by their correct title (Senator, Representative, etc.).
2. State your purpose clearly – Include the issue or bill in the subject line and opening sentence.
3. Introduce yourself– Identify yourself as a constituent, registered voter, and a registered nurse.
4. Share your position and request – Clearly state your stance and the action you want the legislator to take. Support your message with key facts and, if appropriate, a brief personal story.
5. Explain the impact – Describe how the legislation affects constituents and patients.
6. Keep it concise – Limit your email or letter to one page. Attach only one document if necessary.
7. Restate the ask – Close by reminding the legislator of the specific action you are requesting.

Social Media⁹

Not all legislators are engaged in social media. Check your legislator’s personal website to see which social media platforms, if any, are used by your legislator. Review the platforms they are using to see how it is used to connect with the constituents: to share information, elicit feedback, or possibly engage in discussion.



Online Resources

Legislative information is widely available online, with many nursing organizations—including ASPAN—offering easy access to key updates and resources directly through their websites. Below are some useful internet legislative resources.

Many legislators use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to share updates. They may post from official or personal accounts, and some maintain blogs or dedicated pages.

The following is a list of useful internet legislative resources:

ASPAN website: www.aspan.org

The Governmental Affairs page provides information on ASPAN's activities, action alerts, monthly legislative updates, and links to other legislative websites.

United States Senate: www.senate.gov

Provides Senators and committee directories, Senate schedule, committee hearing schedule, Senate floor activity, search for bills, and much more.

U.S. House of Representatives: www.house.gov

Offers information on Representatives and committee directories, hearing schedules, and allows users to identify and contact their Representatives.

Congress: www.congress.org

Provides a Congressional directory by state, alphabet, committee and leadership, Executive/Judicial branches and Governors. Sign up for Megavote to track your Senator's and Representative's votes by email.



National Council of State Legislatures: www.ncsl.org

Provides links to state legislative websites.

National Council of State Boards of Nursing: www.ncsbn.org

Offers links to individual state boards of nursing as well as state nurse practice acts and regulations.

Additional nursing/legislative/political links of interest:

- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: www.ahrq.gov
- American Society for Pain Management Nursing: www.aspmn.org
- American Nurses Association: www.nursingworld.org
- Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network: www.c-span.org
- (US) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
- Democratic National Committee: www.democrats.org
- (U.S.) Department of Health & Human Services: www.hhs.gov
- Federal Register: www.federalregister.gov
- (U.S.) Governmental Accountability Office: www.gao.gov
- (U.S.) Governmental Publishing Office: www.gpo.gov
- Health Resources and Services Administration: www.hrsa.gov
- Kaiser Family Foundation: www.kff.org
- League of Women Voters: www.lwv.org
- National Association of Counties: www.naco.org
- National Governors Association: www.nga.org
- National Institutes of Health: www.nih.gov
- National Journal: www.nationaljournal.com
- Nursing Community Coalition: www.thenursingcommunity.org
- Project Vote Smart: www.votesmart.org
- Republican National Committee: www.gop.com
- RN Action (American Nurses Association): <https://rnaction.org/>
- Roll Call (one of the most read newspapers on Capitol Hill): www.rollcall.com
- White House: www.whitehouse.gov



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