Taking Action:
Nurses’ Guide to Legislative Advocacy
OREGON STATE LEGISLATURE: THE BASICS

How a Bill Becomes a Law
Tracking Legislation and Issues

GET INVOLVED: CONTACTING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Writing
Calling
Meeting
Tweeting

STAY INVOLVED: JOIN ONA

Take a lead role in our Health Policy and Political Action Committees
THE BASICS

Oregon has a bicameral legislature, meaning there are two chambers, the senate and the house of representatives. The senate has 30 elected members. The house has 60 elected members.

Oregon runs on biennial (two-year-long) legislative cycles featuring a long legislative session and a short legislative session.

Long sessions happen in odd-numbered years. They begin in January and run for approximately 160 days. Short sessions happen in even-numbered years. They begin in February and run for approximately 35 days. Because Oregon’s legislation sessions are time-limited, legislation can move quickly and with little notice.

Though Oregon’s state senators and representatives are technically part-time positions, most legislators work on policy ideas, bills, sit on subcommittees and meet with constituents all-year-long.
BILLS, BILLS, BILLS

Senators, representatives or committees introduce bills to change state policies. Bills must pass through committees and floor votes in both chambers and are sent to the governor to be signed into law. Here’s how it works:

Once a bill is introduced, the chamber’s leadership (the Senate President or the Speaker of the House) refers it to a legislative committee (a standing group of legislators who have experience in certain areas) for consideration. For example, a nurse staffing bill in the house of representatives may be referred to the House Health Care Committee. The committee is empowered to hold public hearings and make amendments to the bill.

Ultimately, committees either:

- **Hold the bill for future consideration, effectively killing it**
- **Vote to defeat the bill**
- **Vote to move the bill forward** by sending it to the full chamber with a recommendation (i.e. “do pass”, “do pass with amendments” etc.)
- **Vote to refer the bill to a second committee.** This is called dual referral (i.e. a health care bill that requires businesses to fund employees’ health insurance plans may be sent to the Business and Labor Committee after passing the Health Care Committee)

All bills that spend state money must pass the Joint Ways & Means committees in addition to their original committee.

If a bill is passed by a committee, it typically moves to the floor of the full senate or house for a vote.

In the full senate or house the bill can be considered and amended again. To pass, bills must receive a majority ‘Aye’ vote. (31 votes in House, 16 votes in Senate); some bills require larger majorities.

Approved bills are then sent to the other chamber (house or senate) to repeat the process.
Both the house and senate must pass a bill for it to move forward. In cases where the second chamber adds additional amendments, it is sent back to the original chamber to reconcile the changes.

Bills which pass both chambers are sent to the Governor who can allow the bill to become law or veto it.

Vetoes can be overridden by a two-thirds vote of both houses.

**ONE FINAL STEP**

Bills and laws typically cover big ideas. To implement the law properly more specific rules and language is often needed.

Once a law is passed, the state government agencies may create a rules advisory committee to create the state administrative rules which determine how exactly the law will be applied, interpreted and enforced.
TRACKING LEGISLATION

Oregon makes it easy to follow a bill’s progress. Go to Oregon’s Legislative Information System (OLIS) to search for bills, find committee schedules and watch live and recorded committee hearings and floor debates.

[OLIS.OregonLegislature.Gov]

Keep in mind, legislative schedules can change with little notice. Please notify an ONA staff member in advance if you’d like to attend a specific bill’s hearing or legislative event so we can coordinate with legislative schedulers.

Contact us at OregonRN.Org/ContactGR.
There are more ways than ever to connect with your elected representatives and ask for their support; from phone calls to emails to social media and direct in-person advocacy at the State Capitol and at local town halls and events.

Here’s how you can optimize many of those forms of communications to leave a lasting impact on your elected leaders.

We also have many pre-made tools ready to help you advocate for issues important to nurses and our patients. Check in with our government relations team before you get started so we can help amplify your issue.

Contact us at OregonRN.Org/ContactGR.
THE POWER OF EMAIL

Email is one of the quickest, easiest ways to contact your elected representatives. Email works best in bunches, so pick an issue and recruit your friends, family and neighbors to send their own emails supporting an issue at the same time as you.

A single email on a Monday may not make a big difference, but 100 emails in a week will get noticed and earn real consideration from your representatives.

8 Steps to Winning Emails

1. **Find your local legislator** or the legislator you want to influence.

2. **Introduce yourself.** Identify yourself as a constituent (a person who lives in a legislator's district), a nurse, or both. Include a sentence about your practice and how the work you do is connected to your issue (if appropriate).

3. **Use talking points** to summarize the issue. Make your points as clear, concise and succinct as possible.

4. **Be yourself.** Add why this issue is important to you personally. Use your personal experiences to supplement talking points and strengthen your case.

5. **Avoid using shorthand terms, acronyms or jargon.** Many legislators are not experts in health care or other fields and won’t know what an APRN is.

6. **Make the ask.** Tell the legislator exactly what you want them to do and why.

7. **Thank them for their time.**

8. **Let us know who you’ve emailed and on what issues.** We’ll help make sure legislators across the state are hearing from other constituents about key health care and nursing issues!
Subject: Support HB 1111 to Make Prescription Drugs More Affordable

Dear Senator Smith,

My name is Jane Doe and I’m a cardiac nurse at Sacred Heart Medical Center in Springfield. I regularly treat heart patients who require 10 or more prescriptions a day. Every week, I have patients who tell me they’ve stopped taking their prescriptions or split them in half because they can’t afford their medication.

As a nurse, I ask you to support House Bill 1111: The Make Prescription Drugs More Affordable Act, which passed the Senate Health Care Committee yesterday.

This legislation is an important step to make sure every Oregonian can afford the life-saving medicine they need. House Bill 1111 helps make prescriptions affordable for all Oregonians by:

• Capping co-pays at no more than $100 per prescription.
• Increasing reporting and transparency around the true costs of prescription drugs.
• Holding the pharmaceutical industry accountable for prices that exceed a fair rate of return.

Passing this bill is critical to make sure everyone in our community can afford the lifesaving medications they need.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have questions or if I can provide more information, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe, RN
Oregon Nurses Association member
Springfield, OR
PICK UP THE PHONE

Calling can seem old-fashioned but it has upside. You usually get a real, live staff person on the phone and they’re usually obliged to listen to you. That means your issue gets heard that day. Staffers can be trusted members of a legislators’ team acting as important issue researchers and advisors particularly at the local or state level, so getting them on the phone to make your case can be very valuable.

In addition, live phone calls are harder to ignore than digital communications. You have the floor and you have their attention for the next few minutes. Use it wisely.

8 Steps to Winning Phone Calls

1. **Prepare your pitch.** Plan out the main points you want to say in advance.

2. **Introduce yourself.** Identify that you’re nurse and constituent—say where you live/work etc.
   a. **Tip:** Ask who you’re talking with and use their name in your conversation. At the end, thank them personally for listening.

3. **State the issue you want to talk about and ask if you’re speaking to the right person.** Oregon legislators rely on a few staff members to do everything, but federal legislators often have specialized issue experts on staff who will know more about your subject. They’re the ones you want to speak to.

4. **Share your story using talking points and your personal connection to the issue.** If you have a reason you’re particularly passionate about a topic, don’t shy away. Lean in and share why this really matters to you personally. Chances are others feel the same way.

5. **Make the ask.** Politely tell your legislator or staffer what you’d like the legislator to do.

6. **Be specific.** Give the bill number and name of your issue whenever possible.
   a. **Tip:** You may be asked to email a summary of the issue. Great! Write down the staffer’s email address and use the sample email above to craft a persuasive email. Make sure to reference your phone conversation with them in the email as a reminder.

7. **Be brief.** Everyone appreciates a succinct argument.

8. **Thank them for their time.**
Sample Persuasive Phone Script

Hi, my name is __________. I'm a nurse at _______ and I live in _______.

I'm calling to ask LEGISLATOR to support House Bill 100 to protect health care for the 400,000 children who rely on the Oregon Health Plan.

In my work I care for many of these children and their families. SHARE PERSONAL STORY ABOUT THE IMPACT LOSING HEALTH CARE COVERAGE WOULD HAVE FOR YOUR PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

As a nurse, I urge LEGISLATOR to support House Bill 100.

Thank you.

Sample Thank You Phone Script

Hi, my name is __________. I'm a nurse at _______ and I live in _______.

I'm calling to thank LEGISLATOR for supporting House Bill 100 and protecting health care for the 400,000 children who rely on the Oregon Health Plan.

In my work I care for many of these children and their families. SHARE PERSONAL STORY ABOUT THE IMPACT LOSING HEALTH CARE COVERAGE WOULD HAVE FOR YOUR PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

Thank you for supporting House Bill 100.

It truly makes a difference for kids in our district.
TESTIFYING

Testifying before a legislative committee is a big deal. You get to make your case directly to key legislators and the public. Your testimony is preserved for the record and helps drive the narrative and news coverage around your issue.

We often coordinate nurse testimony on important legislative issues. Connect with our government relations team if you’re interested in volunteering to testify on a bill or issue.

Contact us at OregonRN.Org/ContactGR.

Before Testifying

- **First, contact ONA to help you get started.**

- **Do your research.** We can provide statistics and talking points, but it’s helpful to know your issue yourself including its benefits, costs, what opponents might say and most importantly, how it affects you and your community and why it’s important to fix it now.

- **Find out which committee is considering your bill and when.**

- **Prepare written testimony.** See guidelines on how to testify below. Your written testimony can be longer and contain more information than verbal testimony.
  
  - It’s helpful to prepare written testimony first, then summarize it. The summary is your verbal testimony.

- **Email your written testimony and materials** including reports, handouts, presentations, to the appropriate committee at least 24 hours in advance so it can be posted electronically to OLIS for the members and public to view.
  
  - Find committees and email addresses to submit testimony under the ‘Committees’ tab at OLIS.OregonLegislature.Gov

We'll help you prepare, write and submit testimony on many issues. Contact us at OregonRN.Org/ContactGR to get started.
The Big Day

- **Arrive early.** Find the hearing room and sign in first to make sure you are on the testimony list.

- **Check in with ONA staff.**

- Once called up, **begin your testimony by saying “Chair ______, and members of the committee”**.

- **Next state your name, where you are from, and the organization you represent** (if speaking on their behalf).

- **Clearly state whether you support or oppose the bill you are testifying on.**

- **Explain your background.** Include your credentials and your experience with the issue you’re testifying on.

- **Don’t read your testimony word-for-word.** Just give them an outline of your main points. Legislators usually have your written testimony open in front of them while you present.

- **Share relevant personal experiences and anecdotes.** You’re the expert and your experiences are part of your expertise. Personal experiences also humanizes your issue for legislators.

- **Stay on message.** Be clear, concise, and succinct.
• **Be prepared to shorten your testimony on the fly.** Generally, you will have 3 to 5 minutes for verbal testimony, but the committee may ask you to keep your remarks shorter based on time constraints.

• **At the conclusion of your testimony thank the committee for the opportunity to testify, and offer to answer any questions.**

• **Begin answers to questions by saying “Chair (name of legislator chairing committee, and then the title and name of the member who asked the question. Example: Chair Smith, Representative Jones.)**

• **Don’t guess or make up information.** If you do not know the answer to a question, tell the legislator you don’t have that information at this time, but you’d be happy to follow up with them.

  Make sure to tell an ONA staff member the legislator and the question so we can follow up with them and get them the information they need.
NICE TO MEET YOU

One-on-one or small group meetings with legislators and staff are some of the best opportunities to positively influence your elected officials. Here’s how to do it successfully in either a 1-on-1 or group setting.

If you have an issue you’d like to meet with your legislator about, please contact us to help set it up.

Contact us at OregonRN.Org/ContactGR.

Before the Meeting

- **Schedule a meeting** with your legislator or the key legislator on your issue. Be open to meeting with legislative staffers instead. They often have more time to meet and are important issue researchers and advisors to lawmakers particularly at the local and state levels.

- **Be prepared.** Make a short meeting agenda and practice your legislative visit in advance. This is especially important with group meetings.
  
  o Decide what stories and statistics you’ll share.
    ▪ Who will say what?
    ▪ Who will take notes?
    ▪ Who will follow-up afterwards?

- **Make a 1-pager.** A 1-pager is a short, 1-page explanation of an issue or bill.
  
  o A 1-pager summarizes an issue/bill by stating the problem, the solution, key stats and information, the names of other influential groups who support your issue, and your contact information or contact information for the organization you represent.
    ▪ ONA can help provide 1-pagers for major legislative issues.

- **Arrive early.** Introduce yourself to the legislator’s staff and be understanding if the legislator or staff is running behind schedule. It’s a common occurrence and doesn’t reflect on your issue’s importance to the legislator.
During the Meeting

- **Introduce yourself and your team.**

- **Use talking points and handouts** to make your points as clear, concise and succinct as possible.

- **Be yourself.** Talk about why the issue is important to you personally. Use personal experiences to strengthen your case.

- **Lobby as a team.** Give everyone in your group the opportunity to participate.

- **Be conversational.** Avoid using shorthand terms, acronyms or jargon that might be unfamiliar to legislators or staff.

- **Listen to the legislator’s responses, concerns and questions.**

  - Respond to questions as best you can, but if you aren’t sure, **don’t guess or make anything up.** Let ONA staff know about questions so we can follow up with legislators to provide answers.

- **Keep things friendly and avoid party politics.** ONA is a non-partisan organization and works with all legislators, regardless of party affiliation.

- **Make the ask.** Tell the legislator or staffer exactly what you want them to do.

- **Leave your 1-pager behind** with the legislator or staffer so your issue stays visible and they can revisit your information. If they ask you to email it instead, write down their email address and send the 1-pager and a short thank you referencing your meeting as soon as possible.

- **Capture your visit with photos and videos** featuring the legislator or staff and your team to share with ONA and on social media.

- **Say thanks.** Thank them for considering your request or supporting past bills/efforts if applicable.

- **Have fun!** Enjoy your meeting even if the legislators or staff don’t say yes to everything you ask.
After the Meeting

- **Follow up.** Work with ONA staff to address any questions or requests for additional information.

- **Send a thank you card** after the meeting reminding legislators and staff about your ask, thanking them for their time and consideration and giving them a way to contact you or ONA staff if they have additional questions.
TOWN HALLS AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

Town halls and other public events are an opportunity to draw attention to your issue and spark action. Your legislator may not agree with you before an event and they may not agree with you after, but part of their job is to listen to you and respond. Listening to and engaging with voters is the reason your elected official is holding the event.

Convincing an official can take time. For some issues, the value of a town hall isn’t to win over a legislator on the spot, it’s to show your representative—and your community—that your issue is important and it won’t go away until your legislator takes action to address it.

Go in with the goals of drawing attention to your issue, getting a clear response from your representative and sparking action and you will be successful.

Planning to attend a town hall? Let us know so we can support you!

Contact us at OregonRN.Org/ContactGR.

Before a Town Hall or Community Event

- **Find out when and where** a town hall or other public meeting with legislators will be held.

- **Tell your friends—and ONA—about the event.**
  - If multiple people want to go, hold a group meeting to prepare for the town hall in advance.

- **Develop a short list of questions your group will ask** your legislator during the event or 1-2 questions for an individual.

- **Talk with ONA about a media strategy.**
  - Sometimes it’s helpful to draw media attention to your issue at the town hall. We can work with you to provide talking points and background information for reporters in advance.
It’s Time for a Town Hall

- Go in a group.
  - Show your strength! A chorus is louder than a single voice.
- Get there early and get organized.
  - Save seats, hand out literature or signs, direct supporters where to go.
- Ask your questions and share your stories with your legislator.
  - Use talking points to be as clear, concise and succinct as possible.
  - Make it personal. Share why the issue is important to you personally.
    Use your experience to build on talking points and strengthen your case.
  - Borrow on your group’s strength. We’re all just one person, but there are many other people like us. Let your legislator know “There’s 20 nurses in my unit and every one of us feels this way.” Etc.
  - Ask ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ questions or other questions with clear-cut, specific answers.
    - If they dodge your question, request clarification or ask a follow-up.
- Hold the floor or microphone until you feel your legislator has given an answer. It’s OK to be polite but persistent.
- Get it on the record.
• Large or potentially contentious town halls or community events can be good times to record your legislator so voters know their positions and see how they treat their constituents.

• Talk with legislative staff
  o Most federal legislators and a few Oregon legislators will have a staff member at an event. They will be the people who look like they are waiting on or assisting the legislator, before, during or after the meeting.
  o Identify legislative staff early, talk with them before or after the meeting, get their business card and share your story and opinion with them too.
  o Leave a 1-pager or other fact sheet with the legislator or assistant. They will likely share your 1-pager with other staff.

**After the Town Hall**

• Reach out to ONA after the town hall and let us know how it went.
• Share your photos and videos from the event on social media with ONA, your social media followers and local media.
  ▪ Facebook: @OregonNursesAssociation
  ▪ Twitter: @OregonNurses

• Follow up with a phone call and email to thank your legislator for meeting and remind them about your issue.
BE SOCIAL

Using social media to influence legislators has clear benefits and drawbacks. It’s easy, fast and public. Some of its advantages are also disadvantages. Because it’s easy to do it’s easy to ignore. It’s fast so questions and posts are quickly supplanted by new content. And it’s public so there are many people vying for your legislators attention.

While not as effective as in-person meetings, when used correctly social media outreach is a key part of issue campaigns.

Keys to Social Advocacy

• **Make your contacts count.** Legislators are most interested in hearing and responding to their constituents—the people who elect them. Show that you are their constituent by including your hometown in your social media bios or turning on Facebook’s constituent badge.

• **Find your legislators.** Most will use multiple social media sites and often have multiple accounts; one for official public business and another for their campaign.

• **Choose the account that matches your issue.**
  - Ex. If you’re asking for a vote on a current bill, contact the official account. If you’re asking about a fundraiser, use the campaign account.
  - When in doubt, use the one the legislator updates most often.

• **Become a regular by commenting and asking relevant questions on their posts.**
  - Make sure you’re commenting quickly. In the first two hours is recommended.
  - Organize others to do the same.

• **Tag your legislators in posts you want them to see.** These should be related to the issue you care about and with clear direction on what you want them to do.

• **Consider using or creating hashtags connected to the issue** to help your campaign standout.
  - Ex. #ProtectOurCare #ACA #Yeson101
JOIN ONA AND GET INVOLVED

For nurses and allied health workers, your first step is to join ONA.

Go to JoinONA.org to take advantage of all ONA has to offer.

Once you’re a member it’s time to connect with our government relations team who can help you identify how you can make a difference on the health policy, advocacy and election issues you care about. In the meantime, take a look at some of the many opportunities ONA has to offer our members.

Contact us at OregonRN.Org/ContactGR.

Cabinet on Health Policy

ONA’s Cabinet on Health Policy is a member-led group which determines legislative priorities, researches health care issues, develops position statements, and represents ONA in public forums. Cabinet members work closely with ONA’s government relations team to develop and implement ONA’s health policy positions.
Political Action Committees: ON-PAC and NU-PAC

ONA has two political action committees (PACs) to best serve our members’ interests. The Oregon Nurse Political Action Committee (ON-PAC) focuses on candidate work. Through ON-PAC, ONA members interview, endorse, and support candidates for office who share our vision and have a record of supporting our legislative agenda. ON-PAC members organize grassroots activities to support the candidates they endorse including member communication, phone banks, and canvassing.

The Nurses United Political Action Committee (NU-PAC) is dedicated to advancing ONA policy priorities through Oregon ballot measures. NU-PAC makes it a priority to defeat ballot measures which limit the rights of employees to actively participate in union activities. NU-PAC also supports many initiatives related to health policy or revenue for programs important to nurses. Like ON-PAC, NU-PAC members organize and support grassroots activities including voter contact, member outreach, and coalition building.

Oregon Labor Candidate School

ONA is a founding member of the Oregon Labor Candidate School (OLCS). The OLCS provides training and tools to union members so they can run a successful campaign for public office. Many ONA graduates from the school have went on to serve in elected and appointed positions from state legislative seats to local school boards and more.

The school is non-partisan and open to all union members interested in workers’ issues and public service.

Learn more at www.oregonlaborcandidateschool.org.

Contact ONA’s government relations team for help applying.

Ready to get involved?

Contact us at OregonRN.Org/ContactGR and get started today!