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Communicating with Your Legislators

Letters, e-mails and phone calls can be particularly effective in influencing legislators' views. In-person visits are *the most helpful at influencing* legislators on how to vote on legislative proposals. Writing to legislators is an opportunity to maintain contact and keep your issues on the front burner even when you cannot meet personally. Almost everyone knows a nurse. The ratio of employed LPNs/VNs is between 65 and 70 per 100,000 people in Alaska, Oregon, and Utah and over 400 per 100,000 in Arkansas and Louisiana (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

The number of employed registered nurses (RNs) per population in each state varies widely, from fewer than 700 RNs per 100,000 population in Nevada to over 1,500 RNs per 100,000 in the District of Columbia (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Connect with your legislator and begin a constituent nurse expert relationship. Please check the Nurses Take DC website for resources on contacting your federal legislators, Factsheets and bill information! Nurses Take DC website: <https://www.nursestakedc.com/>

Writing an effective letter/email message: federal legislators at <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>

KEEP IT BRIEF

- Keep your correspondence to one page. Use a respectful tone in your letter. Keep it simple, one issue per letter. *Send along with your letter* a Factsheet on the bill proposal you are asking the legislator to address. If writing to a federal House Representative the bill is H.R. 2581; if federal Senator its S.1357.

INTRODUCING YOURSELF

- Introduce yourself. Share that you are a registered nurse (how many years) what specialty area(s) you have worked, and if you are part of an organization on whose behalf you are writing.

WASTE NO TIME TO GET TO THE POINT

After your introduction, get to your brief statement on your issue or concern, such as "We urge your support for H.R. 2581, Nurse Staffing Standards for Hospital Patient Safety and Quality Care Act of 2019, which will set mandatory nurse to patient staffing ratios in hospitals". *If you are writing in reference to a specific bill, include the bill number.*

- Follow your opening paragraph with a concise explanation of why you support or oppose the particular bill or issue. Support of the nurse staffing ratio proposal is detailed in numerous evidence-based research on public safety – please utilize data to make your argument for the issue. *Many articles on our website.*

RELATE IT TO HOME

- Share with the legislator in your own words, how unsafe staffing is affecting the care of your patients, your family and their constituents when receiving hospital care. Share what your education taught you, and how a work environment with inadequate nurse staffing impacts your ability to deliver safe care. Assist the legislator to understand why your position is important to his or her constituents – use your own knowledge and experience to inform the legislator.

MAKING THE ASK

- This is where you specifically ask for the legislator's support of the bill and ask for them to sign on as a *co-sponsor* of the bill. They may need time, be gracious and thank them for their attention to this important issue.

ALLOW FOR FOLLOW-UP

- Share your personal contact information and inform the legislator you are always their resource should the legislator or staff have questions or need additional information. *State in the letter that you will follow up with a telephone call* and inquire on your request to legislator becoming a bill sponsor.

THANK YOU

- Always thank the legislator for their attention to your legislative issue and hopefully on their support.