

SCAPTA-PAC

Building A Relationship with Your Statehouse Representative or State Senator

Building a relationship with your legislators is the single most important component in being active in politics.

• HOW TO MEET WITH YOUR STATEHOUSE REPRESENTATIVE OR STATE SENATOR

- **Why should you meet with your state legislator?**
 - Building statewide influence begins at the local level.
 - That means in order for SCAPTA to be recognized and respected by state decision makers, members must demonstrate their value to their legislators at the local level (their home district).
 - Building awareness about PTs and their value to the community is a potent weapon, and accomplishing this goal has the added bonus of helping PTs win favor for local issues as well.
- **Keep in mind that you are there to educate and build an important relationship.**
 - District office meetings with state legislators are a good chance to get to know your statehouse representative or state senator.
 - Introduce yourself and share why physical therapy is important and a valued health care benefit to the legislator's constituency.
 - Explain the key issue(s) and why it's/they're important
- **Know your key messages.**
- **How to set up a meeting with your state legislator.**
- **How to prepare for the meeting.**
 - Know your state legislator's background: whether he/she is well versed on health care issues, has taken a position on the issue or has heard of the legislation. Go to <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/legislatorssearch.php> to locate the legislator's webpage, and find his/her biography.
 - Be direct, clear and brief and keep in mind the legislator's time is limited.
 - Study the SCAPTA key messages, fact sheets and frequently asked questions beforehand. Research the issue.
Research opposing arguments and be prepared to argue your position. Prepare Your "Ask." Legislators will want to know how they can help you. Be sure you have a concise "ask" in mind. Your "ask" could be for co-sponsorship of a bill, oppose a bill, or the meeting could be to say "thank you" if they are already supportive.
- **How to start the conversation.**
 - Introduce yourself. Provide your business card. The legislator or staff member you are meeting with will want to know how to reach you in case they have questions as they are reviewing the materials you leave behind. Leaving your business card is a professional and easy way for the staff to receive your contact information.
 - Stay focused on the issues. Try to redirect the conversation if it veers off course. Most importantly, don't forget to personalize your message. Be prepared to explain the issues in layman's terms as this may be the first time they are hearing about it. They will not be familiar with physical therapy, so stay away from the jargon and technical terms when explaining the issue. Don't forget to talk about how the issue impacts patients.
 - Keep in mind that schedules can change at the last minute so don't be surprised if your meeting is delayed, which can happen due to voting or hearings. Make sure to bring materials that you can leave behind including your contact information (a business card is ideal) and fact sheets on the issue(s) you are discussing.
 - Capture the moment. Bring a camera and to get a quick photo with your state legislator. This is a good item to include in a follow up thank you note after the meeting.
- **How to conclude the meeting and follow up.**
 - Make your position clear, and tell your state legislator exactly what you want him or her to do. Be very specific about the action you need from your legislator on the issue.

- Ask if the legislator has any questions or would like additional information.
- Offer to be a resource on health care topics. Offer to provide a presentation to a community group of the legislator's choosing.
- Always follow up with a brief thank-you note mentioning your bill number or agenda. Include a photo from your visit if you took one at the meeting.
- Send positive news articles to your legislator as well.
- If a special event is going to take place, invite the legislator and his/her staff.
- Call SCAPTA and let us know how your visit went. This is key information as the lobby team follows up with the office when you return home.

• HOW TO CORRESPOND

1. Write Your Legislator

Writing Tips:

Use the following helpful writing tips:

- Identify the individuals to include in your communication. The letter/e-mail should be addressed to your state legislator.
- State the issue and corresponding bill number (Senate or House) in the subject line when sending an e-mail.
- Keep your written correspondence to one page whenever possible
- Address letters in the following format:

Senator
The Honorable (full name)
South Carolina Senate
Gressette Building
Columbia, SC 29201

Representative
The Honorable (full name)
South Carolina House of Representatives
Blatt Building
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Senator (last name):

Dear Representative (last name):

- Close your letters by including your name, title, and address. It is essential to have your address listed on the letter. This is how your state legislators know you are a constituent.

2. Call Your Legislator

- Phone Tips
 - Phone calls can be an effective outreach method if you have an established relationship with your legislator and/or his/her staff.
 - Phone calls are also useful if you experience time constraints due to swift pending actions (votes) or your own personal time limitations.
 - Phone calls can be used to learn where your state legislator stands on an issue which you can then incorporate into a follow-up letter.

Phone Call Script Example:

Good morning, my name is ____ and I am a constituent of Senator/House member ____ and am calling on behalf of issue XXX also known as Bill #.

a) Does the Senator/Representative support or oppose this legislation?

b) I would like to encourage Senato/Representative ____ to support this important legislation

Yes/Supports: *As a physical therapist, I appreciate his/her support on this important issue that not only impacts the profession but also the patients we serve. As a PT in the state of State Carolina, I alone see more than # of patients. I am only one of x # PTs in my area so you can see the impact this legislation would have on people in his state. Thank you for your time.*

No/Needs More Info: Provide a brief personal story regarding the relevance of this legislation to your daily life. Make sure to include the impact it has/would have on the broader community as well (patients) if appropriate.

I would be happy to e-mail some supporting documents or information about this legislation.

*Contact SCAPTA if your legislator's office expresses interest and needs additional information you may not feel comfortable providing.

Thank you so much for your time.