ONS Chapter Advocacy Toolkit

What is an advocacy event?

An advocacy event is a virtual or hybrid event in which ONS members gather with the ultimate goals of 1) educating policymakers and 2) influencing public policy. Advocacy events are one way that ONS chapters can engage in public policy issues related to nursing, oncology, and the medical field in general.

Why are advocacy events important?

Advocacy events are important because oncology nurses can use their collective voice to influence policy. Hosting an advocacy event allows a chapter to stay up to date on current issues affecting your membership, and shape legislation to improve the future of oncology nursing and cancer care.

What are some important tips to keep in mind?

- Start your planning early – the earlier, the better!
- Make sure you are staying on message with ONS-specific priorities. There are many cancer-related pieces of legislation, but focus your ask on those that are most impactful to oncology nursing.
- Be sure to follow-up and maintain relationships with policymakers.

Does ONS have a Center for Advocacy and Health Policy?

Click here for the Center for Advocacy and Health Policy. On this site, you sign up for health policy alerts, learn about ONS’s health policy priorities and agenda, and view available resources.

Who should I contact for support?

Please contact ONS Health Policy staff at healthpolicy@ons.org for any policy-specific questions or contact chapters@ons.org for logistical assistance or event-related inquiries.
Pre-Event Checklist:

- Hold initial organizing meeting (identify planning team, check state legislature’s calendar, identify possible dates, etc.).
- Review Advocacy Day plans with the full Chapter Board.
- Schedule regular meetings of the planning team (at least 5 months prior to event).
- Design the overall event plan and budget, which can include:
  - Any venue costs
  - Food/catering costs (if applicable)
  - Handouts, fliers, folders, signage etc.
- Select and confirm venue.
- Identify key legislators and contact schedulers to determine availability.
- Schedule 15–30-minute meetings with legislators and/or their staff.
- Share “Save the Date” with your Chapter members.
- Post event information and registration link on your chapter site and any chapter social media pages.
- Determine your asks. What will you be asking legislators to do? ONS largely allows each state to determine its legislative asks, but they may not be in opposition to the ONS Health Policy Priorities and Agenda.
- Notify the Director of Government Affairs and Advocacy about your event and your asks. If you would like them to join, either virtually or in person, submit this form (link). Note, if the Director does attend the event in-person, the sponsoring chapter(s) are responsible for any travel expense incurred.
- Develop agenda.
- Invite speakers (if applicable).
- Send reminders to chapter members and neighboring chapters to solicit participation.
- Appoint a photographer (this can be a chapter member or volunteer).
- Assemble folders/packets for legislators and attendees.
Week of Event Checklist:

- Confirm logistics with venue.
- Confirm volunteers and share logistical information.
- Confirm speaker arrival time and greeter.
- Print registration list and other important documents.
- Provide maps of the facilities for appointments and receptions.

Set-Up:

- Make sure the venue has a registration table outside the room (if applicable).
- If asking any local media outlets to attend, have a press station available at the event with press releases, supporting documentation and other information.
- Clearly mark your event with identifying and directional signs.
- Place signage outside of the room, and in the lobby area of the venue.

Post-Event Checklist:

- Hold a debrief.
- Send thank you notes.
- Follow-up with any information or other action items promised at the meeting.
- Keep track of the bills and issues and monitor your legislator's actions. If they follow through on a promised action, be sure to thank them. If not, encourage them to do so.
- Continue to build relationships by inviting legislators and their staff to attend or speak at chapter events and keeping them informed about chapter affairs.
Planning and Venue:

Selecting a date for a state advocacy event:

Visit your state's legislature webpage to determine when legislative sessions are scheduled. You can typically find this page through an internet search using terms like "Pennsylvania state legislature." Once there, you may need to explore multiple dates to find a suitable time that accommodates legislators, staff, and attendees.

Consider hosting your in-person meeting near the state capital or within its complex, if permitted. This choice will facilitate seamless transitions for your attendees between your meeting venue and their legislative appointments. Moreover, it ensures convenient access for legislators and staff. If you’re interested in securing a venue within the capitol complex, connect with a state legislator’s staff to explore availability.

If a building in the state capital is not an option, check with local hospitals or other healthcare facilities for free or discounted space (particularly if any chapter members are employed by the institution). Local libraries and universities may also have free or discounted meeting spaces available.

Contacting Local Officials:

1. Identify Your Legislators: Find out who your local legislators are. This includes your local, state, and federal officials. You can typically find this information on your state government's website or through nationwide online databases like: [https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials](https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials)

2. Choose Your Method of Contact: You have several options for reaching out:
   - Phone Call: This can be the most direct way to speak with someone. Look up their office number and call during business hours. You may still need to submit a form to book an appointment.
   - Email: You can find their email address on their official website or through online directories.
   - Social Media: Some legislators are active on platforms like Twitter or Facebook. Direct messaging or tagging them in a post can sometimes get their attention.
   - Website Form: Many legislators have a contact form on their official website that you can fill out.

3. Draft Your Message: Whether calling, emailing, or using another method, make sure your message is clear and concise. Introduce yourself, explain the purpose of your meeting (advocacy on a particular issue), and suggest some dates and times that would work for you.
4. **Follow Up if Necessary**: If you don't hear back within a reasonable amount of time, don't be afraid to follow up. Politely remind them of your initial request and ask if they've had a chance to consider it.

5. **Confirm the Meeting**: Once a meeting time has been agreed upon, make sure to confirm the details in writing (email is usually best). This helps ensure that everyone is on the same page and reduces the likelihood of any misunderstandings.

**Contacting Other Chapters:**

Your chapter is encouraged to collaborate with other groups in your state or region. If you would like to contact the surrounding chapters to invite them to work with you on an advocacy event, please contact chapters@ons.org for a list of contacts.

**Requesting ONS Speaker Support:**

If you are interested in ONS government relations staff speaking/presenting at your event (either in-person or virtually), please fill out our Advocacy Speaker Request form. ONS staff will make every effort to accommodate your request, schedule permitting. Please submit this application at least 60 days before your intended event.
Meeting Tips:

You Represent ONS
As you meet with legislators and their staff, you are representing ONS and our key legislative positions that make a difference for oncology nurses. Focus on the ONS legislative issues and share relevant information about your experiences as a nurse treating patients with cancer. Remember that nurses are the most trusted healthcare professionals, and your voice as a dedicated oncology nurse deserves to be heard.

Dress Professionally
Because you are representing a professional organization and meeting with influential decision-makers, it's important that you dress in business attire, such as a suit, dress, or pants with a nice sweater or shirt and comfortable walking shoes. Please avoid wearing jeans, shorts, sneakers, etc. Although most state legislatures do not have an official dress code for office visits, we must dress respectfully to give a good impression of ONS and the oncology nursing profession.

Arrive Early
Please arrive early rather than be late for a scheduled visit. As you enter, please be quiet and respectful of front office staff who may be busy working. Introduce yourself to the receptionist and let them know who your visit is scheduled with. They may ask you to sit in their front lobby or wait in the hallway if your group is large or the office is crowded. Sometimes congressional staffers offer snacks and drinks for visitors, and you may even be greeted by a friendly office dog.

Be Polite
Don't be surprised if the staffer you meet is very young and you are not able to meet the actual lawmaker. Staffers are very knowledgeable on issues and processes and convey your visit details and requests to their bosses. Treat them as politely and respectfully as you would the elected official. Give the staffer your full attention, make eye contact, and avoid checking your cell phone during the visit.

Introduce Yourself
Start your meeting by letting them know where you live and work. Making local connections is valuable! If you have business cards, bring them to leave with the staffers you meet.

Make Your Ask
As soon as you’ve introduced yourself, make your ask. Lawmakers and their staff expect the ask. Present the issue and what you would like them to do. If they ask an question that you do not know the answer to, do not guess at an answer. Take their card and get back to them with an answer.
**Stay on ONS's Message**  
Give the ONS folder to the staffer at the beginning of your meeting so they can review it and take notes. As you go through the key issues, be careful not to let the member or staffer lead you away from your topics. You have limited time to make your key points on the ONS priority issues and answer questions, so remain focused. If they ask about other issues, graciously tell them that you will bring those to the attention of ONS Government Affairs and turn the conversation back to why you are there.

**Avoid Personal Politics and Causes**  
Please do not use ONS advocacy events as an opportunity to promote your personal politics and causes. Outside of chapter advocacy, we encourage you as a constituent to contact your representative and senators and share your personal views on any issue you'd like, but please do not do so at an ONS event.

**Tell Your Story**  
Oncology nurses have an important and unique perspective on healthcare nurses. Your experiences are important and influential. Be prepared with specific stories to share in your meetings. Stories can be incredibly meaningful.

**Say Thank You**  
At the end of the visit, thank the legislator or their staff for their time.

**Follow Up**  
After your meeting, follow up via email with the staff. They will provide you with their business card, and in this toolkit, you can find a draft thank you message to personalize and email to them after your visit.
Sample Meeting Request Email:

Subject: Request for Meeting to Discuss [Advocacy Topic]

Dear [Legislator’s Name],

I hope this email finds you well. My name is [Your Name], and I am a constituent from [Your City/Town] in your district, and a member of the [Chapter Name] chapter of the Oncology Nursing Society. I am writing to request a meeting with you to discuss an important matter that affects our community: [Briefly describe the advocacy topic or issue you want to discuss].

As oncology nurses, we are passionate about [briefly explain why this issue matters to you and to oncology nursing]. We also believe it is crucial to engage in constructive dialogue with our elected representatives to explore potential solutions and advocate for positive change.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to share more information about this issue and to discuss how we can work together to address it. The [Chapter Name] chapter is hosting an advocacy day on [Event Date], and we would be honored if you could find time for a brief meeting during the event. Please let us know what works best for your schedule, and we will do our best to accommodate.

Also, if there are any materials or background information you want us to provide before the meeting, please tell us.

Thank you for considering our request. We look forward to the possibility of meeting with you to discuss this important matter further. Your time and attention to this issue are appreciated.

Warm regards,

[Your Name]
[Your Phone Number]
[Your Email Address]
[Chapter Name]
Sample Thank You Message:

Subject: Thank You for Meeting With Us

Dear [Legislator’s Name],

Thank you so much for taking time to meet with me and other nurses from the local chapter of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) to talk about several bills to greatly improve access to quality care for patients with cancer. As we discussed, ONS strongly supports and urges passage of the following pieces of legislation:

- List legislation discussed here.

Thank you for your support and consideration. If you have any questions, please contact the ONS Director of Government Affairs & Advocacy at healthpolicy@ons.org.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Your Phone Number]
[Your Email Address]
[Chapter Name]
Sample Agenda:

Below is a real example of a two-day event agenda, hosted by an ONS chapter. With fewer speakers the event could be consolidated into a one-day event, if the chapter was able to schedule afternoon meetings with legislators.

**Day 1**

- 7:00 AM  Breakfast and Registration
- 8:00 AM  Welcome Remarks
- 8:15 AM  Keynote Speaker
- 9:15 AM  Guest Speaker 1
- 9:45 AM  Guest Speaker 2
- 10:15 AM Break
- 10:30 AM Guest Speaker 3
- 11:00 AM Guest Speaker 4
- 11:30 AM Lunch
- 12:30 PM Guest Speaker 5
- 1:00 PM  Introduction of Bills
- 1:10 PM  Education (covering information on each bill)
- 1:55 PM  Break
- 2:15 PM  Group Selection (break into legislative groups)
- 2:25 PM  Practice (roleplay example meetings with legislators)
- 2:35 PM  Conversation Outlining (decide who will cover what bills in each group, what will each person say, who will start and end, etc.)
- 3:05 PM  Overview of Day 2 Logistics
- 3:30 PM  Questions
- 4:00 PM  Wrap up

**Day 2**

- 7:00 AM  Breakfast and Registration
- 8:00 AM  Review of the Schedule
- 8:30 AM  Meetings with Legislators
- 12:00 PM Evaluation and Wrap Up