

## A MEDICAL STUDENT'S GUIDE TO ADVOCACY

### Health Advocacy in General

The voices of medical students (future physicians) in the public forum are important, especially as they relate to patient health and physician wellbeing. To that end, there are many routes available for students to become active in health advocacy.

Laws and regulations are made at the local, state, and federal levels; so advocacy at any of these levels can be pursued.

### Know Your Representatives

- **City, Town, or County:** Many jurisdictions maintain a city council, selectmen, or a board of supervisors. Because there are so many, each locale has its own directory, and, therefore, no centralized database. It is best to use a search engine or call your local city or town hall for more information. An example is below:
  - **Omaha City Council** - <https://citycouncil.cityofomaha.org/council-members>
- **State:** Lawmaking at this level usually affects state-level programs such as health care funding via the Department of Health and Human Services (or similarly named agency), as well as regulations that impact physician practice. States also have the ability to adjust taxes to raise revenue for health-related resources. As with the local level, each state typically maintains a website which lists state officials such as the governor, state senators, and administrators. Examples are below:
  - **Nebraska Governor's Office** - <http://www.nebraska.gov/government/executive-branch/>
  - **Nebraska Legislature** - [https://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator\\_list.php](https://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_list.php)
- **Federal:** The highest level of lawmaking; these laws have nationwide implications. This includes legislation such as the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and agencies such as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Information about congressional representatives, senators, and their respective committees is relatively easy to find on federal websites. Examples are shown below:
  - **U.S. Senate** - <https://www.senate.gov>
  - **U.S. House of Representatives** - <https://www.house.gov>



## Ways to Pursue Advocacy

- **Write a letter or call in:** This method can be done at any time of the day. Almost all elected officials maintain a number to call or address to write to. They also retain staff to respond to constituents in a timely manner. In many cases, you will receive a follow-up letter or email about progress on your area of concern. Depending on the issues being addressed by the American College of Surgeons' Advocacy Division, there may be pre-written form letters under the "Take Action" link on the ACS website, that will auto populate with your representatives' contact information and pre-set text. More information can be found here: <https://www.facs.org/advocacy/surgeonsvoice/take-action>
- **In-person meeting:** Meetings with an elected official or their staff usually require an appointment, but often they can be easily accessible. You can visit either as an individual or as part of a group or organization, and you are more likely to engage in dialogue or receive immediate feedback on your concerns in this manner. See ACS "Tips for Successful Meetings" for additional ideas here: <https://www.facs.org/advocacy/surgeonsvoice/tools/guide>
- **Voting:** One of the best ways to advocate for specific concerns is to elect officials who share your same concerns and views.



- **Host an event on campus:** Raising awareness about many causes can be achieved by a public or campus event. For example, causes important to the surgical profession include blood, bone marrow, and organ donation drives, cancer awareness campaigns, and public campaigns such as Stop the Bleed. The resources below will give you a place to begin when hosting a campus event.
- **Remember: All politics are local.** Advocacy usually starts at the grassroots level for issues that impact you or others in your community. As the primary champions for a certain cause, you can often be effective at this level. Issues that gain national traction often start off as spirited grassroots efforts that eventually extend beyond the bounds of the local community.



## Advocacy Opportunities through ACS

The College maintains a robust advocacy arm that is active at the federal and state levels. ACS is also active among physician organizations such as the American Medical Association to represent the voice of surgeons in organized medicine. Moreover, the ACS hosts an annual Advocacy and Leadership Summit in Washington, DC, where students are welcomed and can get involved.

### **ACS State Chapters (includes Canada and other International Locations)**

- Contact information for local groups of surgeons can be found on this page of ACS's website: <https://www.facs.org/member-services/chapters/find>

### **ACS Advocacy Committees - <https://www.facs.org/advocacy/committees>**

- Health and Policy Advocacy Group
- Legislative Committee
- Health Policy Advisory Council
- Committee on Health Care Disparities

### **Active ACS Issues - <https://www.facs.org/advocacy/federal>**

- Quality Payment Program
- Opioids and Surgical Care
- Graduate Medical Education and Workforce
- Cancer and Research

## Ways to Get Involved

- **ACS Medical Student Community** - <http://acscommunities.facs.org/home>
  - Forum for medical students interested in surgery
  - Great starting point to propose and brainstorm advocacy ideas, as well as garner support and resources from other students across the country
- **ACS Leadership & Advocacy Summit** - <https://www.facs.org/advocacy/participate/summit>
  - Registration fees have been waived for medical students





- **SurgeonsVoice** – <https://www.facs.org/advocacy/surgeonsvoice>
  - Advocacy tools and available resources, such as reports from the Health Policy Advisory Council and a “Find Your Legislator” database



- **SurgeonsPAC** - <https://www.surgeonspac.org>
  - Political action committee (PAC) dedicated to advancing causes important to ACS members



- **State Legislative Action Center** - <http://capwiz.com/sslac/home/>
  - Compilation of health policy-related issues in states, as well as a repository for determining elected officials in your area
- **Stop the Bleed** - <https://www.bleedingcontrol.org>
  - Resources for layperson training of bleeding control techniques



- **Other**
  - Locate other national nonprofit organizations for information and resources of blood, bone marrow, or organ donation, or cancer awareness.