

Grassroots Advocacy

Advocacy, simply put, is the application of pressure on the people and institutions that have the power to give you what you want.

Grassroots advocacy is a “bottom up” approach to social change that utilizes real people from the community, rather than paid staff or lobbyists, to shape public policy. Grassroots advocates have a special power relationship with elected officials because, as voters, they have the power to hire or fire lawmakers. Grassroots advocacy harnesses the power of effective one-on-one relationships multiplied over and over. So the goal of any grassroots program is to build a critical mass of supporters – the more the better.

If you serve as a grassroots advocate for CMA, your level of participation can range from simply becoming informed on an issue and attending a training session to meeting with your elected official and providing testimony at a public hearing. Also, you can encourage your colleagues, family, friends, and even your patients to join you in your efforts.



CMA Past President Dr. Dev GnanaDev testifies before the Senate Business and Professions Committee.

Politics and Medicine Are Different!

For many people, the public arena can be intimidating and uncomfortable. Physicians are no exception. The combination of unfamiliarity with the process or system, physicians’ own time constraints, and the slow, deliberative nature of the policy process often leads physicians to frustration and disinterest.

After all, physicians are science-minded individuals who treat the many ailments presented by their patients every day. The time from diagnosis to treatment intervention can be relatively brief compared to the slow crawl of identifying a public health concern and passing a law.

HOW ELECTED OFFICIALS THINK

When it comes to matters of health, you are the specialist and the lawmaker is a generalist. Legislators don’t need to know everything you know about a particular issue – they just need to know enough to be convinced to take action. You may help persuade them if you keep in mind that a lawmaker is often guided by these six questions:

- Does this make for good public policy?
- Does this make sense?
- How does this affect my district?
- Will it help or hurt me politically?
- Does anyone back home know or care about this issue?
- Who supports or opposes this issue?

Any good player knows – it's all in the follow-through.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Getting to know your elected officials can seem intimidating, but, chances are, you already know them through your community affiliations. An elected official may be a member of your health club, community organization, church, or sports program. Maybe your kids go to the same school. Even if you don't "know them," you live in the same world.

Capitalizing on these common experiences can be extremely useful because they create a natural bond between you.

- Meet with your legislator locally. This will afford you the time and opportunity to educate your legislator about your issues.
- Attend your legislator's local events and town hall meetings. Ask to be added to your legislator's mailing or e-mail list to learn of upcoming events.
- Communicate with your legislator often. Legislators typically only hear from constituents right before the scheduled vote.
- If your legislator is supportive, be sure to thank him/her.
- Volunteer for campaigns and attend fundraisers.
- Participate on advisory committees.

MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

You worked hard to build positive relationships with elected officials. Don't let that effort go to waste. Find ways to keep the dialogue open between you and your elected officials, such as attending local town hall meetings, events, and their annual fundraiser or picnic.



CMA members meeting with John A. Perez, speaker of the California State Assembly.

Reaching out to local officials requires clarity and facts, but also a healthy respect for the work they are elected to do.

MEETING WITH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL

A face-to-face meeting with your elected official can be a powerful way to advance your agenda. The meeting can also position you as a reliable expert on public health issues and an important ally for your local elected official – if it's done right. Follow these steps for a successful visit:

- Plan your meeting. If you go with a group, decide who is going to lead the meeting and what each person will contribute to the discussion. This will help eliminate awkward silences or repetitive messages. And it will ensure that you hit all the key points that you want to cover. You may have only 10 minutes for your meeting, so plan accordingly.
- Know your audience. Do a little research about your public official. Find out his or her positions on your issue.
- If there are multiple issues that are important to you, select one to discuss for that meeting. Attempting to address multiple issues dilutes your impact on each issue.
- Define your message. Focus your comments on one issue. Then plan two or three observations or arguments that get at the heart of your position.
- Be flexible. Don't be surprised if your appointment changes. Public officials often have last-minute hearings or other events.
- Once you're in the door, begin by finding something personal that you have in common with the public official. Do you live on the same street? Are your kids at the same school? Does something in the office suggest an interest that you share – fishing, sports, or art? A little “small talk” breaks the ice – but keep it brief!
- State your case. Keep it concise, focused, and personal.
- Invite comments and questions. Engage them in dialogue. Don't worry if you don't have the answer to a question – use it as a chance to get back to them.
- Ask for a commitment. If you don't ask for action, you won't get any. If they decline, encourage them to think about it, and say that you'll keep in touch.
- Have a leave-behind, a brief written statement (one page, maximum) on the issue you discussed.
- Visit more than once. Over time, continue to discuss the issue and make requests. Be a reliable source by delivering what you promise, avoiding overstatement, and communicating clearly.

CALLING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL

Making a phone call to your elected official is quick, is easy, and can be done at a moment's notice, making it an attractive method of contact. For these same reasons, it is critical that the phone call be effective. You don't need to be an expert on the issue to be persuasive; you just need to give your personal perspective. Here are some guidelines for making the call:

- Plan. Before you make the call, plan what you are going to say. Your phone call will be very brief, so keep your message simple and to the point. Practice making your case in as few words as possible.
- Message. After identifying your request, think about a key point or personal story that supports your position.
- Staff or message. You may have to speak to a staff person (if available) or leave a message. Make sure you get the staff person's first name. Always treat staff with respect.

- **Constituent.** Begin by stating that you are a constituent and give your street address. If you voted for the official, mention that as well.
- **Persuade.** State your reason for the call. Try to get the public official to state their position on the issue, and try to persuade using the points you developed.
- **Recruit.** Recruit a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to make a call as well, particularly if the support seems weak and the official could use a little more encouraging.

E-MAILING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL

E-mail can be an effective way to communicate with lawmakers if they are e-mail savvy and if a relationship already exists. Here are some tips to make your e-mails more effective:

- State your request concisely.
- Provide personal examples and local context. If you are sending a generic form e-mail written by someone else, use personal examples to “keep it real.”
- Persuade a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to send an e-mail as well. Public officials pay attention when many constituents write about an issue.

WRITING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL

Writing a letter to your legislator allows you to give more information than a phone call, and often to have greater impact than in an e-mail. Consider following your letter with a phone call or a visit for more interaction. Follow these basic steps for writing your letter:

- **Personalize your letter.** Handwritten letters have the most impact. If you are basing your letter on a grassroots form letter, rewrite it, or at least retype it. Photocopies of generic letters don’t cut it. Use personal examples and share your story.
- **Use the news.** News stories can illustrate your point.
- **Local, local, local!** Make a strong connection between the issues and the local community that the elected official represents.
- **If elected officials supported your issues in the past,** acknowledge and give reasons why they should continue their support.
- **Have a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague write as well.** Elected officials listen when many constituents speak out on an issue.
- **Communicate more than once.** One letter will not seal the deal.



CMA medical students on the California State Assembly floor.

Message . . . Message . . . Message

YOUR MESSAGE

The obvious places to speak out are one-to-one conversations with your patients, in discussions at your clinic, and in presentations to associations and extended networks. The first step in developing your message is asking yourself the following question: “What gets me what I want?” Keep the following points in mind:

- Address your strengths. As a physician you are automatically an assumed expert on public health and medical science. So stick to the public health aspects of your message.
- Understand and defuse arguments. Anticipating the opposition’s claims or countering an assertion can be an effective strategy for neutralizing their arguments. But it should not be the sole focus of your message. As a general rule, devote no more than 20 percent of your message to “arguing.”
- Consider your audience. Your message will be different if you are addressing a patient one-on-one, a gymnasium full of school-age children, or a county board of commissioners.
- Don’t overwhelm people with the facts. And avoid medical jargon – language ordinary people don’t understand.



“We owe it to our profession, our patients and our children to speak out on issues of health policy that will determine the future health of our communities.”

Paul Phinney, M.D.
Chair of the Board of Trustees
California Medical Association

If one doctor is credible, two or three (or four) are unbeatable.

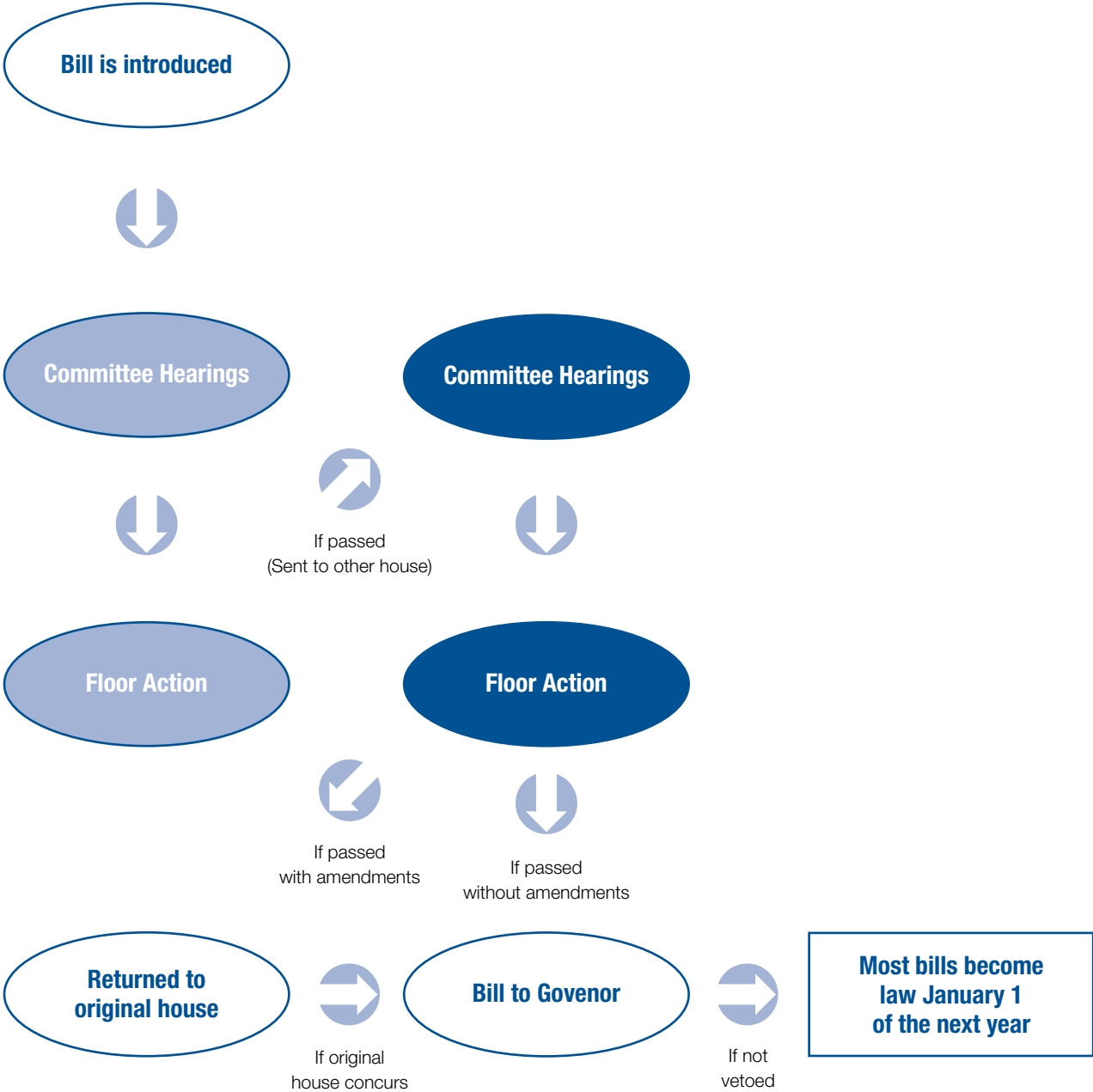
Sharing your experiences shows other physicians they can get involved; they can make a difference.

RECRUITING OTHER PHYSICIANS

Making physician-to-physician presentations about the importance of getting involved and taking action is a very effective recruiting strategy. Physicians face many barriers to becoming more involved in campaigns for public health issues. However, when physicians are involved early and often, they can be the difference between failure and success. This section briefly addresses some of those barriers.

Roadblock	Removal
Time <i>"There aren't enough hours in the day for me to see patients, be part of my family, and moonlight as a grassroots activist!"</i>	Then do small things. Write a letter to the editor. Attend a single meeting. Make a phone call. CMA can get you involved in the least intrusive way.
Need to Be Experts <i>"I'm a doctor! I don't want to speak out on an issue until I have all my bases covered!"</i>	Yes, you need to know the topic at hand. But you only need to know how it affects patients' health. There is room for physicians with every level of issue expertise.
Focus on the Individual <i>"I prefer to focus my time on helping individuals."</i>	Physicians who have worked on public health campaigns will tell you they were able to help so many more people.
Health System <i>"I don't want to make waves. My clinic doesn't want me spouting off."</i>	Your system will often give you leeway if you are working with CMA.
Inappropriate <i>"Doctors shouldn't get involved in policy squabbles."</i>	Who is more qualified to discuss issues of public health than physicians? Can they justify not speaking out?
Lack of Training <i>"I don't know the first thing about speaking about health policy."</i>	CMA can provide both the "how to" advocacy training and a review of the science on most public health issues.
Apathy with the Process <i>"The policy process is too bureaucratic. Nothing ever gets done."</i>	Even though the political process is cumbersome and yes, sometimes ineffectual, sooner or later something is going to happen, whether physicians are involved or not. If you are not at the table, are you on the menu?

How a Bill Becomes a Law



Courtesy of www.legalinfo.ca.gov

Overview of Legislative Process

The process of government by which bills are considered and laws enacted by the California State Legislature is commonly referred to as the legislative process. The California State Legislature is made up of two houses: the Senate and the Assembly. There are 40 senators and 80 assembly members representing the people of the State of California. The Legislature maintains a legislative calendar governing the introduction and processing of legislative measures during its two-year regular session.

IDEA

All legislation begins as an idea or concept. Ideas and concepts can come from a variety of sources. The process begins when a senator or assembly member decides to author a bill.

THE AUTHOR

A legislator sends the idea for the bill to the Office of the Legislative Counsel, where it is drafted into bill form. The draft of the bill is returned to the legislator for introduction. If the author is a senator, the bill is introduced in the Senate. If the author is an assembly member, the bill is introduced in the Assembly.

FIRST READING/INTRODUCTION

A bill is introduced or read the first time when the bill number, the name of the author, and the descriptive title of the bill are read on the floor of the house. The bill is then sent to the Office of State Publishing. No bill except the budget bill may be acted upon until 30 days have passed from the date of its introduction.

COMMITTEE HEARINGS

After introduction, a bill goes to the rules committee of the house, where it is assigned to the appropriate policy committee for its first hearing. Bills are assigned to policy committees according to subject area. For example, a Senate bill dealing with health care facilities would first be assigned to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee for policy review. Bills that require the expenditure of funds must also be heard in the fiscal committees, Senate Appropriations and Assembly Appropriations. Each committee is made up of a specified number of senators or assembly members.

During the committee hearing, the author presents the bill to the committee, and testimony may be heard in support of or in opposition to the bill. The committee then votes on whether to pass the bill out of committee, or amend it and pass it as amended. Bills may be amended several times. It takes a majority vote of the committee membership for a bill to be passed and sent to the next committee or to the floor.

Each house maintains a schedule of legislative committee hearings. Prior to a bill's hearing, a bill analysis is prepared that explains the intended effect of the bill on current law, together with background information. Typically the analysis also lists organizations that support or oppose the bill.

SECOND AND THIRD READING

Bills passed by committees are read a second time on the floor in the house of origin and then assigned to a third reading. Bill analyses are also prepared prior to the third reading. When a bill is read the third time it is explained by the author, discussed by the members, and voted on by a roll call vote. Bills that require an appropriation, or that take effect immediately, ordinarily require 27 votes in the Senate and 54 votes in the Assembly to be passed. Other bills generally require 21 votes in the Senate and 41 votes in the Assembly. If a bill is defeated, the member may seek reconsideration and another vote.

REPEAT PROCESS IN OTHER HOUSE

Once the bill has been approved by the house of origin it proceeds to the other house, where the procedure described above is repeated.

RESOLUTION OF DIFFERENCES

If a bill is amended in the second house, it must go back to the house of origin for concurrence, meaning agreement on those amendments. If the house of origin does not concur in those amendments, the bill is referred to a two-house conference committee to resolve the differences. Three members of the committee are from the Senate and three are from the Assembly. If a compromise is reached, the bill is returned to both houses for a vote.

GOVERNOR

If both houses approve a bill, it goes to the governor. The governor has three choices: sign the bill into law, allow it to become law without his or her signature, or veto it. A governor's veto can be overridden by a two-thirds vote in both houses. Most enacted bills go into effect on the first day of January of the next year. Urgency bills and certain other measures take effect immediately after they are enacted into law.

CALIFORNIA LAW

Each bill that is passed by the Legislature and approved by the governor is assigned a chapter number by the Secretary of State. These chaptered bills are statutes and ordinarily become part of the California Codes. The California Codes are a comprehensive collection of laws grouped by subject matter.

The California Constitution sets forth the fundamental laws by which the State of California is governed. All amendments to the California Constitution come about as a result of constitutional amendments approved by the voters in a statewide election.