

# Illinois Health Care ASSOCIATION®



Since 1950



## IHCA Grassroots Manual



# INTRODUCTION

## This manual has been prepared as a resource to support lobbying efforts by IHCA.

Over the years, we have asked IHCA members to take part in the lobbying process and to work to get our message across to elected officials. It is this partnership...this working together over the years...that has made us so successful in our efforts to advocate for the residents of your facilities and programs.

Now more than ever, the part you play in the lobbying process is critical. Elected officials want to hear from their constituents. Your voice carries a great deal of weight as elected officials frame their positions on issues and determine how they will vote.

Within this manual are some essential tools needed to be effective in the lobbying effort and focuses on legislative lobbying directed primarily at the Illinois General Assembly. Legislative lobbying can take many forms, which can be either up front and in the open or behind the scenes...to enact favorable legislation or defeat unfavorable legislation. It can set up a new program, change an existing one, guarantee certain rights, appropriate funds or alter a governmental agency's function or jurisdiction.

There are three main focuses in this manual:

- **The Power of Personal Contact**
- **The Power of the Press**
- **The Power of Political Involvement**

Knowing how to effectively use the methods and strategies outlined in this manual for each of those tactics will assure success in your grassroots lobbying efforts.

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# THE POWER OF PERSONAL CONTACT

There are a number of ways that you can effectively interact directly with your legislator. What follows are a few of those methods and how best to achieve results through their use.

## Writing a Letter to Your Legislator

Writing a letter to your legislator can be effective in supporting a specific piece of legislation and making your views known. The challenge is making sure that your letter will be read completely and thoughtfully. Legislators receive dozens of letters each week. By writing a one-page letter that clearly states your key messages in a reasonable manner, you will optimize your chances of making a positive impact.

Here are some useful letter writing techniques:

- Keep your letter concise and to-the-point. In almost all cases, letters to legislators should be no longer than one page. Legislators are extremely busy people and do not have time to read through long and monotonous letters. Focus on your key messages.
- Carefully proofread your letter for errors. Spelling and grammar mistakes undermine your credibility and detract from your messages.
- Type your letter on your facility's letterhead. Do not handwrite your letter, and avoid the use of postcards.
- Be sure to address your letters properly. Use the following format:

*The Honorable Jane/John Doe  
State Senator/State Representative/Governor of Illinois  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code*

Dear Senator Doe/Representative Doe/Governor Doe:

- Include data about your nursing facility, such as number of employees, number of residents, description of services, property taxes, spending for community vendors and so on. This will demonstrate your facility's impact on the local community.
- If you are a legislator's constituent, be sure to mention this fact in your letter.
- Whenever possible, write your letter about a specific bill, not just a general subject. Limit yourself to one piece of legislation with each letter. Identify the bill's name and number, such as "Senate Bill 2880, Comprehensive Older Adults Act." Specify precisely what you want the legislator to do, such as support or not support an upcoming bill.
- Include facility and personal examples whenever possible. For instance, when discussing Medicaid cuts, you could mention how these cuts will undermine your facility's ability to offer competitive wages and benefits to potential front-line employees.
- Do not send out a form letter. Be sure to personalize your letter and make it your own. If sending to more than one legislator, write to each legislator individually.
- Request that the legislator state his/her position in a reply letter back to you. This strategy encourages the legislator to make a commitment on your issue. Supply your full address to allow the legislator to respond.

\*\*\*SEE SAMPLE LETTER TO LEGISLATOR ON THE NEXT PAGE\*\*\*

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# SAMPLE LETTER TO YOUR LEGISLATOR

[Your letter head]

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Your Name  
Address  
City, State, Zip Code

{Date}  
The Honorable John Doe  
State Senator  
Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Senator Doe:

My name is Jane Doe and I am an administrator of Brookdale Health Home, an Intermediate Care Facility for the Developmentally Disabled that resides in your district. Our facility cares for 150 of your residents and has over 150 employees. Most of our residents are persons with mild to profound developmental disabilities, many of whom are also physically challenged. Brookdale is not a facility that takes care of loved ones for their family, rather is a place that takes care of loved ones with them.

I am writing you in regard to SB 2840. My main concern at the moment is a provision in the bill which eliminates the state reimbursement for bed reserve days for adults age 21 and over in nursing homes. If this provision passes, our facility will be held responsible for the cost of holding a bed when parents take their child home for the weekend to enjoy family. In order to maintain continuity of care, the increased cost to the facility will eventually be passed down to our residents and their family. These families should not be fined for taking their children home.

I appreciate your help and ask that you please send me a response letting me know how you plan to vote for this legislation.

Thank you for your time and considering my request.

Sincerely,

[Insert Your Name]

# CALLING YOUR LEGISLATOR

Phone calls to legislators are important in ensuring that the long term care community is well served in Springfield. In most cases, this timing will reflect when voting on a particular bill is approaching.

State legislators usually have two offices: an office in their home district and another at the State Capitol. When the legislature is not in session, make contact with legislators at their district offices. When the legislature is in session and activity on a bill is imminent, call legislators at their Springfield offices.

If you do not know the names and numbers of your legislators, either contact the IHCA office, or visit the General Assembly website at [www.ilga.gov](http://www.ilga.gov) and use the legislator lookup located on the front page. Here are some recommendations for making phone calls:

- When calling the legislator, identify yourself by name and the facility you represent. Let the legislator know if you are from his/her district. For example, *"This is Lester White, administrator at Your Town Nursing Home in City, IL a facility in your district."*
- Try to focus your call on a specific piece of legislation. Identify the bill you are calling about by name and number. For instance, *"I am calling in regard to SB326, the Nursing Home Safety Task Force legislation."*
- State your position in a few sentences to the legislator and how you would like the legislator to vote on the bill.
- Try to speak with the legislator directly. If not possible, be sure to leave your message with the office secretary or legislative assistant.
- Try to find out the legislator's view on the bill or the issue. If possible, try to obtain a commitment on how the legislator will vote.
- If the legislator would like more information on the issue, send over any fact sheets or talking points about the subject that you have received from IHCA. If you need additional materials to present to your legislator on an issue, please contact the IHCA office.
- Always be polite and courteous. Never use a threatening or abusive tone. Respectful communication is paramount in building a strong bridge for current and future legislative activities.

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# COMMUNICATING THROUGH EMAIL

## Increasingly, legislators are utilizing email to communicate with their constituents.

However, some legislators do not have email. Also, while sending emails may be fast and easy, it is usually not the most effective way of communicating your position, since it is less personal than other approaches, but there is a growing number of legislators who communicate more often in this way.

Here are some general guidelines for email:

- An appropriate use of email is to reinforce that you recently sent a letter or made a phone call. Use your email message to remind your legislator of your key messages.
- When possible, send your email the day before the vote on an important piece of legislation.
- Keep emails concise and to-the-point. Identify yourself by name and the facility you represent. Let the legislator know if you are from his/her district. Identify the bill you are writing about by name and number and write just a few sentences explaining your key points.
- Creating an appropriate subject line is extremely important. Legislators receive dozens, if not hundreds of emails each day, and they are quick to delete them. Make your email stand out. The subject line should include your facility name, town and bill number, such as “Your Facility Name on Senate Bill 608.”
- Never send attachments with your email! People are afraid of computer viruses and most likely will not open any attachments unless they have an ongoing email based relationship with you. If you must include information, embed it in the email message itself.

Call the legislator’s office and ask if emails are welcomed. The use of email varies widely across the legislative spectrum. In general, email should only be used in limited circumstances to reinforce your key messages. Phone calls, letters and personal visits remain your best tools in making the strongest case about a pending piece of legislation.

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# VISITING LEGISLATORS IN-DISTRICT

## Having a face-to-face meeting with a legislator is one of the most successful ways to influence public policy.

The best opportunity to meet with legislators is at their district offices between the spring session and the fall veto session. Most legislators have regular office hours and take appointments to meet with their constituents to discuss important issues. Away from the stresses at the State Capitol, legislators are more relaxed and have the time and the willingness to meet with their constituents.

Here are some suggestions for meeting with legislators at their district offices:

- Always try to make an appointment to see a legislator. Avoid dropping by the legislator's office unannounced.
- Keep your meeting as brief as possible. In general, this meeting should last no more than 30 minutes.
- Be clear about your messages and the action you would like the legislator to take.
- Also, always be sure to provide facts about your nursing facility, including number of employees, number of residents, description of services, property taxes, spending for community vendors and so on. This information will help the legislator understand your facility's role in the community and bring the issue home.
- Know your issues thoroughly. Anticipate the arguments and positions of the opposition. Explain why the issue is important to the long term care profession. **Convey any personal experiences as to how this issue has affected you and your facility.**
- If you don't know an answer to a legislator's question, "I don't know, but I'll find out and get you the answer." is a perfectly acceptable response. Be sure to promptly follow up with any pending information.
- The most effective way to visit the legislator is with a small group. Three people are the ideal. Having too many people will overwhelm the legislator, while one person eliminates the opportunity to demonstrate group unity and share a number of expert opinions. Identify one individual to be the primary spokesperson.
- Be sure to mention if you are a constituent or if there are any family, social, political or business ties. These factors will help the legislator remember you in the future and be more receptive to hearing your opinions and ideas.
- Be polite and respectful in talking with legislators. Keep your emotions in check and maintain a professional tone. Becoming irate will undermine your credibility and diminish the effectiveness of your meeting.
- Offer to be a resource to the legislator on any issues affecting the long term care community. Leave behind a business card for any future questions.

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# FACILITY LEGISLATOR VISITS

**It is important for your legislator to see firsthand the issues that you face on a day-to-day basis as a long-term care provider.**

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Always invite your legislators to special events at your facility or program. You will get even more mileage out of a special invitation to visit your facility/program. This gives you the opportunity to talk to the legislator without other distractions. As part of the visit, introduce the administrator, DON, nurses, therapists, dietitian, and owner so they can briefly explain their roles and how state government affects their tasks as caregivers. The owner and/or administrator should spend uninterrupted time in a private setting to discuss specific issues, especially pending legislative and regulatory action. It might also be appropriate for you to introduce the chairperson of your resident council or even have the legislator meet with the resident council. You will have to use your own judgment on this issue. Always check with IHCA staff prior to such a visit from your legislator in order that you can be updated on crucial issues and the legislator's positions on those issues (if known).

This type of visit/tour should occur at least annually in early spring, if possible, to coincide with the legislative session.

Here are some suggestions for conducting a facility tour:

- Legislators are often willing to visit nursing homes. Use this opportunity to discuss the key legislative issues addressed by the long term care community. Contact IHCA for handouts of key talking points that can be given to the legislator and serve as a springboard for discussion.
- During the visit, have the legislator meet your key staff, such as the administrator, director of nursing, therapists, social services director and activity director, to discuss their roles. These professionals also can briefly mention governmental issues related to their particular professions, such as a nursing director sharing difficulties in attracting and retaining staff as a result of Medicaid budget cuts.
- Schedule time to speak with the legislator privately, without distraction. Use this time to focus on the most important issues affecting your facility, such as late Medicaid payments from the state or rising insurance premiums.
- Discuss key facts surrounding your facility, such as number of beds, resident case mix, payer sources, specialized care units, number of employees, staff retention/longevity, daily costs and so on.
- Have the legislator attend an activity program or resident centered event to showcase the vitality of your facility. In addition, have the legislator meet with the president of your Resident Council and other resident leaders at your facility.
- Focus on your success stories! For instance, highlight a resident who went through your rehabilitation program and has successfully returned to the community. Make it clear to the legislator exactly what makes your facility exceptional and different from other facilities.

# SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

**The fastest growing means of communication, and one that more elected officials are embracing each day, are the various online social media outlets.**

The most popular of these with legislators and those in the legislative arena are Facebook and Twitter.

**Facebook** ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. Many legislators have their own accounts or fan pages.

If you don't have a personal Facebook account, it's easy to create one. Simply navigate in your web browser to [www.Facebook.com](http://www.Facebook.com) and follow the steps provided. It usually only takes about 5 minutes. Once you are logged into your account, there are several tools you can utilize in contacting your legislator and promoting your cause. First, find your legislator using the Facebook search bar.

- They may have a personal account like you. If this is the case, you can add them as a friend. Once they accept your friend request, you may write publically on their wall/timeline. Think of this as a public message that is viewable to their friends and yours.
- They may have a "fan page" instead of a personal page. In this case, you can click "Like" instead of adding them as a friend. You'll still be able to post publically to their wall.
- You can send a message no matter which type of account they have. Sending a message instead of a wall post is a more private approach. Follow the email guidelines provided earlier in this packet when messaging a legislator.
- Finally, you can make a case for your cause on your own timeline and ask your friends and followers to contact their legislator. By asking your friends and followers to help in the cause, you are mobilizing your community in solidarity.

**Twitter.com describes itself like this:** *"Twitter is a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting. Simply find the accounts you find most compelling and follow the conversations. At the heart of Twitter are small bursts of information called Tweets. Each Tweet is 140 characters long, but don't let the small size fool you—you can discover a lot in a little space."*

Twitter moves much faster than Facebook. Most Facebook users only post 1 or 2 posts a day. Users on twitter post (or tweet) 6 to 12 times a day. The newsfeed moves at a really fast passed rate. Once you have a Twitter account setup, you can Tweet (send 140 character public messages) to your local legislators and to your local media outlets (newspapers, TV stations, radio stations, etc.)

## Social Media Guidelines

- Never represent yourself in a false or misleading way. All statements must be true and not misleading; all claims must be substantiated.
- Post meaningful, relevant, respectful content and comments. Do not post spam or remarks that are off-topic or offensive.
- Use common sense and common courtesy. Make sure your efforts to be transparent don't violate general privacy, confidentiality, and legal guidelines.
- Never participate in social media when the topic being discussed may be considered a crisis situation.
- Follow all applicable federal and state requirements, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act ("HIPAA").
- Be smart about protecting yourself, your privacy, and your confidential information. Consider content carefully.

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**It is important to communicate with your legislators periodically throughout the year, even if you are not asking for anything in particular.**

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Intermittent contact with your legislator will erase the stigma that is associated with contacting a public official only when you need something.

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Frequent contacts where no specific needs or issues are at stake are good relationship builders.

### Communicating Through Email

**Host a Town Hall Meeting** – To spotlight an important issue affecting nursing homes, such as inadequate Medicaid funding, host a Town Hall Meeting. Invite your state senator and representative, mayor, residents, staff and family members. Draft an agenda, including opportunities for audience members to ask questions. Have key experts do short presentations to illuminate important messages. Send out press releases to the local media to garner press coverage. At the meeting's end, encourage attendees to make phone calls and send letters to their local legislators to support your cause.

### Visiting Legislators In-District

### Facility Legislator Visits

**IHCA Lobby Day / Participate in a Rally** – IHCA sponsors an annual lobby day in Springfield, each May when the General Assembly is in full swing. This grassroots initiative is extremely important and has become very popular, but believe it or not, some IHCA members have never participated. Some say the process is daunting or doesn't matter or they are uncomfortable in taking part on their own, not knowing what to expect. In that case, you should find someone to join you, but even if you can't, IHCA wants to encourage you to make the trip and we want you to succeed! To help you become comfortable in taking part, IHCA will assist you at every step along the way, from helping you contact your local Senator or Representative's office to set up an appointment, to the day of briefing session, and on the ground staff support in the Capitol.

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Once you've returned home be sure to send thank you notes (and even a picture)! Invite those you've met with to visit your facility and offer yourself as a long term care resource So, don't sit back and let someone else speak on your behalf – sign up, bring a friend and remember to make it fun! When the day is over, please provide IHCA staff with feedback on your appointments as this proves extremely valuable for our follow-up.

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**Volunteer for a Political Campaign** – Contact the campaign headquarters of your favorite candidate to find out how your facility can volunteer. Candidates may need help with several tasks, including stuffing envelopes, making phone calls, and passing out campaign literature. Talk with residents, staff and family members to find out how they would be willing to help. Volunteerism is an extremely powerful tool in developing strong relationships with your local politicians. By helping them during their campaigns, they will become more receptive to speaking with you on issues of importance.

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**Relationship Upkeep** – During the course of a year, legislators make public appearances; attend grand openings and other community events. They also may hold listening sessions, town meetings or campaign events. Your attendance at these events and your support can make you their trusted expert on long-term care.

# LOBBYING 101

## The Ten Commandments of Lobbying

1. **Never lie or mislead** a legislator about the relative importance of an issue, the opposition's position or strength, or any other matter.
2. **Look for friends in unusual places.** In politics, a friend is someone who works with you on a particular issue – whether a Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative – even if that person or group opposes you on every other issue. The more “friends” you can gather on a particular issue, the greater your chances for success.  

This also applies to working with association staff. Often we will ask for your help on a particular issue. If we ask that you write letters or make phone calls, it is important for us to know that this was accomplished. It is helpful if you fax or email to us copies of letters you send. The same is true for sending us a record of the phone calls you make. This is not necessary all the time. You will have many chances to speak to your local elected officials during regular community gatherings.
3. **Never cut off contact with anybody.** Do not let a legislator consider you a bitter enemy because you disagree; today's opponent may be tomorrow's ally. Sometimes you tell us that you do not like your legislator, or he or she has done nothing to help you. We understand that this can occur, but we still ask that you work on developing a relationship with that legislator. It is alright to agree to disagree, but it is important that the legislator knows who you are and what you represent in the community.
4. **Do not grab credit.** Nothing is impossible if it does not matter who gets the credit.
5. **Your word is your bond.** One of the problems with lobbying is that you can over promise and under deliver. When working with elected officials, never promise anything you cannot deliver. This will increase your credibility, as the legislator will learn to rely on you for accurate, timely information that increases your access.
6. **Do not waste time on opponents who are publicly committed to their position.** Sometimes legislators will adopt opinions publicly on an issue. If this occurs, it is often more productive to shore up known allies and to lobby legislators who are less committed or who claim to be neutral or are keeping an open mind. If your legislator has adopted a public opinion that is contrary to yours, let that legislator know why you disagree, ask for reconsideration, and provide additional information. If you still make no progress, let the association know.
7. **Never forget to notice and thank anyone who has helped you.** The “good old boy/good old girl” system is alive and well in Springfield. Take the time to notice when your elected official votes favorably on an issue and drop them a note or make a phone call to say thank you. If you have a question about how your elected official voted, do not hesitate to give us a call.
8. **Do not gossip.** Knowing legislators' peculiarities and peccadilloes is one thing; talking about them is another. Remember that discretion is the better part of valor. Keep what you know personally about the legislator out of any conversation you have publicly or privately.
9. **“When you are crossed politically, don't get mad. Get even.”** (said Bobby Kennedy.) The power of the ballot box is yours. If your efforts to gain support from your legislator have been unsuccessful, you have the opportunity to work against that person when election time comes around. Your efforts may be instrumental in getting a new person elected who may be more sympathetic to the profession and your concerns.
10. **Carry a good luck charm.** In lobbying, you can know your opponent; you can develop imaginative and reasonable compromises; you can burn the midnight oil to digest all the arguments; but it can all go right down the drain if you don't have a little luck.

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**When organizations try to get their ideas and opinions into the public discussion, they often turn to public relations to achieve their desired results.**

Unlike advertising, which can cost companies thousands of dollars, public relations consists of newsworthy messages sent through the media on a non-paid basis.

News coverage carries a great deal of credibility, much more than paid advertising. This credibility can be invaluable to organizations in swaying public opinion. By tapping into the power of the media, nursing facilities have the opportunity to educate the public about the key issues affecting long term care.

Nursing facilities can utilize public relations strategies in influencing state legislators. Politicians often rely on their local media outlets to gauge the significance of public policy issues. These news reports impact their decision-making at the State Capitol.

The Illinois nursing home profession has effectively used public relations techniques to earn a wide range of media coverage over the course of the last few legislative sessions. The following sections address techniques for garnering media coverage, including letters to the editor, opinion editorials, and press releases. We encourage all facilities that receive any positive media coverage, such as a printed letter to the editor, to forward this material to their state senator and representative as a form of legislative outreach. For further assistance with media relations, please contact IHCA.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**A great way to have your views represented in your local newspaper is to write a letter to the editor.**

**Many facilities have found success in placing letters in their local newspapers. Here are some recommendations for increasing the chances of having your letter published:**

- Make letters to the editor short and concise. Letters should generally be less than 300 words, or less than one typed, double spaced page. The shorter the letter, the better its chances of being published.
- Write no more than three or four short paragraphs. The first paragraph should address any previous coverage of the story, such as “In the March 4 issue of the Chicago Tribune you reported that...” The second paragraph should state your side of the argument and introduce something personal. The third paragraph should outline key messages. The fourth and final paragraph should provide a “kicker” to the letter.
- Sign your letter and provide full contact information, including your phone number. Most newspapers will not run unsigned letters and will call you to provide authentication.
- Call your local newspaper to find out the best means of submission, such as postal mail, fax or email. This information may also be listed on the paper’s editorial page.
- Encourage family members, staff and residents to write their own letters to the editor on the issue. However, do not have them all submit the same letter using the same language. Make sure each letter is personal and individualized, incorporating key themes and talking points.
- If your letter to the editor is published, please share a copy of it with IHCA. Also, mail a copy of your published letter to your local senator and representative to obtain the maximum impact from your work.

Remember that space is limited on an editorial page and not every letter will run. Letters that are concise, hard-hitting and personalized will have the best chance of being printed. On the next page is a sample letter to the editor.

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{Date}

Dear Editor,

In the name of creating savings for the Illinois Medicaid programs, the state has discouraged parents from taking their child home for the weekend to enjoy family activities. This so called “SMART Act” is an example of the General Assembly taking a hatchet to the program instead of looking at what will truly work.

The General Assembly recently passed SB 2840, the SMART Act, which prevents those wanting to take loved ones home over the weekend from Nursing Homes without cost. This legislation includes other provisions that effect Long Term Care residents and facilities in the form of rate cuts and elimination of services covered. The signed legislation eliminated payments for bed reserves for all residents of skilled nursing facilities (SNF), intermediate care facilities (ICF) and Institutes for Mental Diseases (IMD). Bed reserve payments are also discontinued for residents of Intermediate Care Facilities for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (ICF/DD) who are 21 years of age and older.

Nursing home residents have borne far too high of a burden under the state’s cuts and that the quality of life for the elderly has suffered far too much. Facilities are now forced to absorb the costs and many will have to pass the expenses down to the family members who wish to provide their loved one with the comforts of home for a short time. These visits are important to the resident in all areas of their health. Getting out of the facility and enjoying activities or home time with their family enriches their lives with a little bit of familiarity outside of the facility.

Long term care facilities are more than willing to sit down with the State to identify waste and abuse in the system in order to achieve the desired savings without punishing residents. It’s time for the General Assembly to go back to the drawing board and repair the harms the SMART Act produced.

Sincerely,

{Your name and address}

# OPINION EDITORIAL

Some newspapers are open to having local readers write *opinion editorials* on issues of importance.

These essays are usually longer in length than a letter to the editor and provide you the chance to address a topic in more depth.

Here are some suggestions for writing and placing an Opinion Editorial in your local paper:

- First step: call your local newspaper and ask to speak with the editorial page editor. Find out if this person is interested in receiving your essay and what the requirements are regarding its length and format. In general, opinion editorials should be 500 – 1,000 words in length.
- Make your opinion editorial timely. Try to write about something that is currently on the news radar screen or is being considered by the legislature or Governor in Springfield.
- Who is the best voice for your editorial? Is it the administrator? Owner? Perhaps the essay would have more impact if a family member or a nursing director wrote it. Consider your options.
- Make your lead paragraph captivating to grab the readers' attention.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs in your op-ed piece. Generally, each paragraph should have no more than three short sentences.
- Consult the IHCA on the key messages for the issue. Weave these messages into your essay. Conclude your editorial by repeating these important messages at the end.
- Include personal stories and anecdotes to add color to your essay and illuminate your key points.
- Avoid technical jargon. Have a few people outside the long term care field read your op-ed piece to make sure they understand your points before sending it to the paper.
- Always include your name address and phone number.

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# PRESS RELEASES

If you are interested in having the media cover a facility event, such as a visit from your state senator or a town hall meeting, you will need to develop a press release.

A press release is a statement sent to the media about an upcoming event or story. There is a format used for press releases (there is a sample release which follows for your review booklet). You should follow that format when sending out announcements to local media.

Keep the press release short, simple and to the point. Press releases should be no longer than two pages. They should mention the most important story information first and then boil down the details. The first paragraph of the release should give the key elements: who, what, why, where, when and how. Later paragraphs can feature the purpose behind the event, background information, quotations from the administrator and owner, etc.

Press releases can be mailed, faxed or emailed. If possible, ask various media representatives which methods they prefer. As a general rule of thumb, for a special event, it is best to send out a press release about one week ahead of time. Then, on the day before the event, send it out again to increase your chances of receiving coverage.

Editors receive many press releases each day. Many times, they will only scan the first few sentences to make a quick decision. Make sure the details of the event are clear in these first few paragraphs. **Additionally, make it obvious why the story would be of interest to the editor's target audience.** Ask yourself: what makes our facility story newsworthy, interesting and unique?

**Follow up the release with phone calls to local editors.** These calls provide the opportunity to sell your story. Often these follow-up calls, and not the press release itself, lead to a media placement.

When speaking to an editor, keep your pitch brief (generally around 60 seconds or less). Present the most compelling information first, **emphasizing why the story is newsworthy.** It may be helpful to prepare a short list of talking points ahead of time and practice making them before calling editors.

Emphasize that you have a whole story package that is ready to go. Mention any residents, staff or families who are available for interviews. Offer to send any additional information needed. Make the editor's job as easy as possible. Following up your press release with a phone call is your best strategy for having your event covered by your local media outlets.

On the next page is a sample press release.

\*\*\*SEE SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE ON NEXT PAGE\*\*\*

# SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release**  
August 23, 2013

**Contact:** Your Name  
Number (888)888-8888  
Fax (888)888-8888  
Email

## SMART ACT PASSES THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY WITH BED HOLD ELIMINATION PROVISION

**Elimination of bed hold payments will be absorbed by  
facilities and resident’s family members.**

**Springfield, Illinois** – The General Assembly recently passed SB 2840, the SMART Act, which prevents those wanting to take loved ones home over the weekend from Nursing Homes without cost. This legislation includes other provisions that effect Long Term Care residents and facilities.

The signed legislation eliminates payments for bed reserves for all residents of skilled nursing facilities (SNF), intermediate care facilities (ICF) and Institutes for Mental Diseases (IMD). Bed reserve payments are also discontinued for residents of Intermediate Care Facilities for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (ICF/DD) who are 21 years of age and older.

SB 2840 is expected to have a savings of \$1.6 billion. The elimination of Bed Hold payments has a savings tag of \$8.3 million. The Department of Human Services representative stated, “There is no justification for additional reimbursements for nursing facilities and supportive living facilities for holding beds for Medicaid clients during periods of temporary absence (i.e. hospital admission).” Local facilities feel differently about the matter.

“The elimination of bed hold payments will deter families from taking their loved one home for the weekend to enjoy time with family” said the administrator of Brookdale Health Home, an Intermediate Care Facility for the Developmentally Disabled. “Our facility will be forced to absorb the costs or eventually pass the expected expenses down to the family members who wish to provide their loved one with the comforts of home for a short time.”

The nursing home industry says their residents have borne far too high of a burden under the state’s cuts and that the quality of life for the elderly has suffered far too much. Other SMART Act reforms include eliminating essential medical services such as dental, vision and podiatry care and a four script limit for those who receive Medicaid.

The Brookdale Health Home will be working with colleagues across Illinois to have the bed hold legislation repealed, and to advocate for a more efficient and reliable Medicaid program without placing the State’s most vulnerable in harm’s way.

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## Every few years you have the opportunity to determine who will represent you in the Legislature.

Prior to voting, you have yet another opportunity to expand your influence. Any election campaign succeeds or fails based upon the kind of volunteer network a candidate is able to create. Your involvement in the campaign activities of your local elected officials can be very important.

This section of the manual will outline some of the opportunities you have to get involved in the campaign activities of candidates. As members, you will have different party preferences. We are not advocating that you abandon any loyalties you may have in this area. However, sometimes certain candidates lean more favorably toward human services issues. These candidates are potentially more valuable to your on-going lobbying efforts.

This section is written from the perspective of state legislative candidates. However, the techniques talked about in this section can be applied to Congressional and local races.

You may choose to get involved in legislative races on your own – this is a great way to get ingrained in the political process.

### Host a Voter Registration Drive

Elections cannot happen without voters, and you must be registered in order to make your opinions known through the ballot box.

Long term care facilities are ideal places to hold voter registration drives as you can reach residents, staff, family members, and community volunteers all in one place. We encourage each of our members to hold a voter registration drive in their facility. As always, IHCA staff is available to assist you in this effort. Here are a few basics you need to know to get started:

1. In order to hold a voter registration drive, you must first be **APPROVED AS A VOTER REGISTRAR**. This involves contacting your local county party (Democrat or Republican) chairperson and completing the necessary paperwork to get approved. Once approved, you are ready to start planning.
2. Get an ample supply of **VOTER REGISTRATION CARDS** from the county so that you are not caught without the proper paperwork. Make sure you can make copies of the forms for registration purposes. If you must use all original forms, you want to know that up-front. Rules vary by county, but should be stated to you upon becoming a voter registrar.
3. Make sure you understand how to **FILL OUT THE VOTER REGISTRATION CARD** properly and that you know where to return the completed cards after your event.
4. **PICK THE DATE** or range of dates and the time of day you will hold your registration drive. It is sometimes beneficial to hold voter registration in conjunction with another event in the facility to increase the amount of traffic you will get on voter registration day.
5. Make sure you have **ENOUGH LEAD TIME** (normally at 3-4 weeks) to promote the drive in your newsletter to family members and to place notices in the local newspaper.
6. **POST NOTICES** to your staff in newsletters and on bulletin boards well in advance.
7. Make sure your **ANNOUNCEMENTS** include notification of the information a person must bring in order to be able to register. These items typically include a photo ID and some type of proof of residence.

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8. On the day(s) of the event, position the **REGISTRATION TABLE** in an easily visible high traffic area so that it is easily accessible to staff, residents, family members and community residents who may wish to register.
9. Make sure you prepare a **HIGHLY VISIBLE SIGN** outside the facility to identify the entrance that should be used by those wishing to register.
10. **SIGNAGE** inside the facility and on the registration table is an important thing to consider. Do not, however, allow “political” material at or near the table.
11. Create a **WORK SCHEDULE** for the registration table to ensure there will always be help available for those wishing to register.
12. Sometimes facilities identify staff members who will serve as **GREETERS** at the door of the facility to direct individuals to the registration area.
13. You might also want to have information about **POLLING PLACES** available at the table so those registering will have some idea of where they may cast their vote. This is not an exact science, however. The county clerk’s office will send notices of polling places to those who register a few weeks after your event.
14. Immediately after the event, take all of your voter registration cards to the proper place for **VERIFICATION AND PROCESSING**.
15. Make sure your reception staff, and all of your staff, understands that you can **CONTINUE TO REGISTER VOTERS** after your event. That way if any interested person were to inquire later, your staff will know how to respond.
16. Do not mix voter registration with **POLITICAL ACTIVITIES** or have literature present at your event. This is illegal. As there is great potential for increasing the number of registered voters in your area through your drive, most local election officials will be happy to work with you to structure your voter registration drive. Your county may even have a specific package of information available to guide you through any special rules and regulations that exist in your area. Be sure you take advantage of all local resources at your disposal.

You might also consider running a contest among employees. Don’t forget that employees may not be registered to vote and they may have family members in the same situation. A contest rewarding the department which produces the most new voter registrations can go a long way to improving the success of your event.

### Serve as Polling Place

Facilities are ideal places for people to vote. Your large size, ample parking, and the fact that you operate on a 24-hour basis all make your facility a desirable location. Your county may already have well established polling places; however, the needs of the county often change.

Before you volunteer, make sure you have the space available. Election officials will need a large room where they can set up the voting equipment. Large community rooms or dining rooms are ideal locations. If you volunteer, make sure you do not schedule any other events for that space on Election Day. If you volunteer your dining room, make sure you have alternate plans for feeding residents.

### Build a Network of Interested Staff

You probably already have some staff that are actively involved in political campaigns, but you would probably have a lot more interested in the process if they understood how they could contribute. Devote a section of your next staff meeting to political involvement. You can use sections of this manual to assist you in planning that session. If you do not have regular staff meetings, use your normal means of communicating with your staff about important issues.

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The important thing for staff to know is that they can devote as much or as little time to this effort as they choose. Involvement in campaigns does not require that you spend every available free moment working for a candidate. The important thing is that if a commitment of time is made, it is produced. Just as we have said in other sections of this manual, if you make a promise, you must follow through or your credibility can be damaged.

Outline for staff the kinds of activities that are available. These include posting yard signs, applying bumper stickers, making phone calls for candidates, helping to stuff mailings, polling, walking door-to-door, and engaging in other public relations activities for the candidate. Each one of these activities will be addressed separately in this section of the manual.

Keep a list of all interested staff with addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses. The party affiliation of each staff member is important as this may influence the candidates for whom they are willing to work. Having this information in one place makes it easier for you to demonstrate to a candidate the extent of your staff volunteer network. Remember, candidates have activities that require volunteers both day and night. Any staff working the night shift also has the opportunity to get involved.

## Build a Network of Interested Family Members

Family members are another source of workers for campaigns. Although these family members may be asked to volunteer by their employers, the more interested parties you have who are knowledgeable about long-term care issues, the greater the impact you can have on a campaign. Use the same principles discussed in the section about gaining support from staff above. Use your newsletter or a personal letter to each family member to solicit those interested in spending a little time working on a campaign. Maintain a list of interested family members, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and party affiliation. It would also be helpful to list the resident's name on the same sheet. Also, be sure to highlight for family members the kind of activities available to them for assisting campaigns. Having this information all in one place makes it easier for you to demonstrate to a candidate your family support network.

## Yard Signs & Bumper Stickers

Your large staff and family network provide opportunities for candidates who need to place yard signs and/or distribute bumper stickers. These are definitely activities you can offer to staff members and family members who have expressed an interest in participating in campaigns. When you have identified a candidate you wish to support, contact their local campaign office and make an offer to support them by posting yard signs and distributing bumper stickers. Give them an idea of how many yard signs and bumper stickers you might be able to post using the homes and vehicles of staff and family members.

## Offer your Phone Lines

At certain times during a campaign, candidates will make phone calls to residents in the area in an effort to assess their campaign success. When this happens, candidates look for businesses that offer the use of their phone lines for an evening. The more callers a candidate can have on the phones at one time, the greater the number of voters that can be contacted in an evening. If your facility has a large number of outgoing phone lines, you may have the type of set-up that would be helpful in these telephone campaigns. Contact the campaign headquarters of a candidate and let them know you are willing to volunteer your facility and your phone lines for an evening.

## Host a Rally, Reception or Meet the Candidate Night

As a prominent member of the community, your facility or program may be the perfect place to host a candidate rally, reception, or "meet the candidate" night. These are also perfect opportunities to partner with other area businesses to hold a joint event for a candidate or group of candidates. Your relationship with the staff of any candidate will go a long way to securing one of these events at your facility. A rally is a major event for which you can secure major media coverage. Work with the individual candidate to determine their level of interest in such an event. If you choose to participate, it will be your job to get good attendance by staff,

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residents, and family members. Don't forget to invite your key friends in the community. Producing a large number of attendees to such an event is why partnering with other local businesses can be helpful.

A reception is normally a smaller group of more influential members of the community. Often a reception is also held to raise funds for a candidate. If you are interested in this type of activity, work with the candidate's staff to determine their needs. Often a candidate will have a minimum dollar amount for participation in such an event. Before you make such a commitment, make sure you can follow-through by producing the required number of participants and the necessary dollars for the candidate. Members of the media are not normally invited to attend in any official capacity at these events.

Holding a "Meet the Candidate night" is much like a rally in terms of the number of voters a candidate will expect to attend. However, these are normally more informal events. There may be a time when the candidate will make a short presentation followed by an opportunity for those in attendance to ask questions. The real benefit of these events is the opportunity for the candidate to shake hands with voters. It is another opportunity for you to showcase your facility to the community and the media. Ensuring high attendance at these events is imperative!

## Headquarters Volunteers

The headquarters office of every candidate survives and thrives on volunteer involvement. Every day and night, the headquarters of the candidate is coordinating some kind of activity that is enhanced by volunteer involvement. These activities include stuffing envelopes, making phone calls to residents of the area to gain support for the candidate, delivering yard signs, applying bumper stickers, polling, walking door-to-door, and engaging in other public relations activities for the candidate. The needs of a campaign organization may vary. That is why it is best to place a call to the campaign headquarters and offer your assistance. Be sure to make it clear you have a network of staff and family members who may be willing to help. The campaign staff will alert you to their needs and give you specifics about what involvement they need from volunteers. It will then be up to you to match your staff and family member network to their needs. Don't forget that it will be your responsibility to follow-up with the people you place in a campaign office to ensure your volunteers are completing their commitments.

## Raising Money

Campaigns rely on contributions to conduct their activities. The opportunities listed in items 1 through 9 represent in-kind contributions to campaigns. This means that they do not require a specific outlay of cash on your part but contribute to the campaign by offering things that would otherwise have to be paid for by the campaign. Some of these in-kind contributions may need to be reported.

You may also choose to get involved in raising cash for a campaign. If this is your desire, make your wishes known to the candidate. The campaign committee will provide you with their guidelines and techniques for raising money.

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