

Engagement of the VDC member in the legislative and political process

Becky Bowers-Lanier, EdD, MPH, MSN, RN

Advocacy chair

Becky@virginiadiabetes.org



On becoming a professional advocate in the public arena: The journey

How do you get to wherever you're going? One step at a time.



Four stages of public advocacy:

Stage 1: Buy-in

- An “aha” moment when the advocate decides to get involved
- Reactive: there is a perceived injustice or issue
- Advocate begins to deliberate over the injustice or issue in reaction to the precipitating event.
- Buys in.



Stage 2: Self-interest.

- Causative issue is related to what I do or who I represent.
- Begin to develop a plan to deal with the problem.
- May seek support from others.



Stage 3: Political sophistication.

- Take advocacy to a more public venue.
- Promotes mission to legislators, policymakers, participates in political coalitions, testifies in committee meetings.
- Seen as the expert.



Stage 4: Leading the way

- Advocate directs the dialogue and policy development for issues
- Takes on positions of leadership within state and national organizations
- Runs for political office
- Serves in governmental positions



Personal Advocacy Tips

- The process is all about interpersonal relationships
 - If you want to influence something or someone, you must develop a relationship with those who have the ability/position to make policy possible
 - A boss
 - A committee chairman at work
 - A community leader
 - A city council member, board of supervisors member, school board member—someone who depends on your vote to create and implement local policies
 - A legislator at state or national level who depends on your vote
 - The better you know the person, the more likely you can influence him/her when you need a vote.

Policies/legislation don't happen overnight

- Questions to be asked
 - What problem are you seeking to solve?
 - What would the end (goal) look like?
 - What potential solutions could help solve the problem?
 - Who are the potential stakeholders? How will they be involved?
 - What resources will be needed to reach the solution?
- If you determine that the solution lies in a change in the law, what steps need to be taken (minimally)?

Time frame for bill development

- March – June
 - Idea development among internal stakeholders
 - First draft of legislative language
- July – September
 - Shop idea/concept/initial draft around external stakeholder groups
 - There should be few secrets
 - Think about patron
- September – October
 - Find a patron
 - Pre-file legislation
 - Continue to massage and problem-solve language

Keys to success in legislative advocacy

- Listen
- Develop and nurture relationships
- Observe non-verbal behavior
- Be flexible and willing to compromise.
 - Determine if incremental approaches are better than no approaches.
- Know who the key people are and work to bring them on your side
 - Longevity
 - Majority party
 - Committee membership
 - Get to know them before you need them.
- Manage Murphy's law. Something is bound to happen. Be prepared for that inevitability.

It's all a matter of timing. When to advocate



Advocating during the General Assembly session

January

February

March

45 days in odd
years

60 days in even
years



Look at the other opportunities for advocacy

April

May

June

July

August

September

October

November

December



Advocate early and often!!