



Advocacy Toolkit

Updated August 2025

The Kentucky Dental Association is proud to welcome you to our Advocacy Toolkit. This resource was created to support Oral Health Advocates who want to make a meaningful impact on the lives of Kentuckians through oral health policy and development.

While this toolkit is designed with beginners in mind, experienced advocates may also discover valuable information and practical tips to strengthen their legislative engagement efforts.

We applaud you for taking the initiative to grow your advocacy skills and for your commitment to improving how legislation influences the oral health—and overall well-being—of every person in Kentucky.

What is Advocacy?

Before we explore ways to advocate for oral health, it's important to first understand what advocacy means, why it matters, and who is involved. Merriam-Webster defines advocacy as *“the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal.”* Simply put, advocacy is taking action to support something you believe in.

While advocacy is often associated with politics—and this toolkit does cover strategies for building meaningful relationships with policymakers—it goes far beyond politics or “elbow-rubbing.” At its core, advocacy is about standing up for a cause you care about and working toward change that improves lives.

As Oral Health Advocates, we recognize that oral health is deeply connected to overall health. That's why advancing policies that expand access to oral health

care is not only worthwhile—it's essential. Creating awareness and driving positive change in this area can have a lasting impact on the well-being of every Kentuckian.

Grassroots organizations can be extremely effective at achieving results on a state level. As a constituent, a health care provider, and a small business owner, you **CAN** affect public policy. Dentists are located in every congressional district and come from all walks of life. Dentists have successfully balanced providing high quality health care to their patients while simultaneously running a successful practice. Members of Congress often look forward to engaging with dentists and the health care community.

Why is Advocacy Important?

Advocacy matters because it raises awareness about critical issues that can improve people's quality of life. Whether we realize it or not, policies influence nearly every aspect of our daily lives—from the standards that keep our water clean, to the speed limits we follow, to the scope of work we are allowed to perform in our professions. All of these are shaped by laws and regulations.

If we don't take part in shaping these decisions, they will be made without our input. Advocacy ensures that our voices are heard and that the policies affecting our communities reflect the values and needs we care about. After all, wouldn't you rather have a say in the decisions that impact your life and the lives of those you serve?

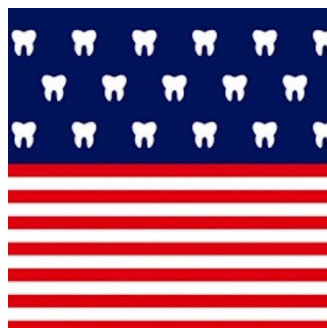


Why is Grassroots Critical?

Congress is going to make decisions that affect your patients and your practice.

It's a certainty. You have a choice; you can sit on the sidelines, or you can get involved and help shape the outcome. By being active in KDPAC's grassroots program, you and your family will have a direct role in the fight for oral health.

- Grassroots activism consists of a group of people with shared interests coming together for a cause in which they believe, in order to help influence public policy.
- Your own personal grassroots political activity is as much a part of dentistry today as patient care, because ultimately the future of oral health care delivery will be affected by politicians in Frankfort.
- As dentists, we must recognize that when our profession becomes the subject of legislation, we will either win or lose. How much is won or lost depends, in part, on our effective grassroots' political participation — your participation. If you are successful, public policy will be positively affected.
- In our competitive system, every citizen falls into one of two categories. They are either “players” in the system — individuals who not only vote, but actively compete within the political arena — or they are “victims” of the system.
- An extensive grassroots network makes our PAC donations more powerful and our lobbyists more effective. Ultimately this creates better public policy.
- Your relationship may grow in importance, for example: your Legislator may run for higher office and will remember their long-time supporters; do not pass up this opportunity.



Creating a Powerful Dentist Advocacy Team

Many of the skills you have developed as a dental professional are directly transferable into the political arena. Dentists are highly skilled in interpersonal communication, assessment, and planning. The challenge, then, is learning how to apply these skills in a political context. Advocating for patients is a fundamental dental skill that can be extended more widely.

First, reach out to dentists that you feel most comfortable with. For example, mention your work for the KDA to dental school friends or fellow members of your practice.

Explain to your colleagues what the KDA does, its successes and why it is so important to join now.

Use local and state meetings to reach potential new members of your team.

Organize your team and collect all of their information including email addresses and cell numbers, this will help when inviting them to special political events and to remind them of actions that they can take part in at home.

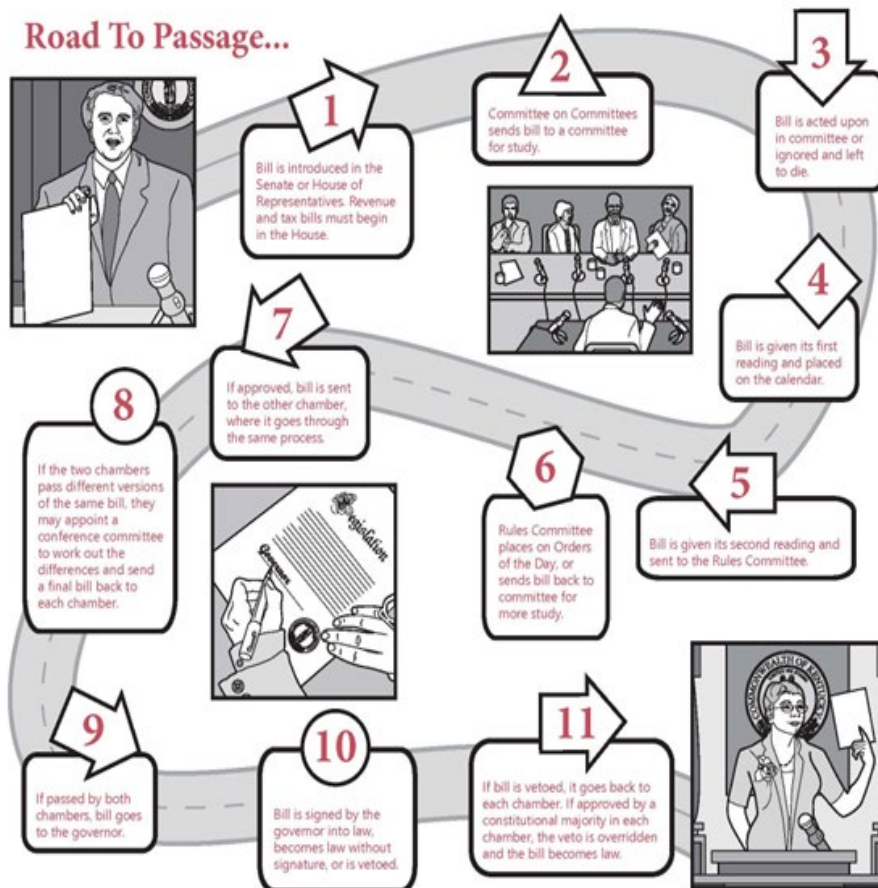
Invite your team to political fundraisers, town hall meetings, congressional visits and other events.

Without your help and enthusiasm, KDA's grassroots activism would never be able to accomplish its goals.

You **CAN** make a difference.



Understanding the steps in which a bill goes through to turn into a law is important in the world of advocacy, because this is how ideas about policy turn into realizations.



Glossary

Amendment - A change to an existing bill. Amendments can be as simple as changing a few words or as complex as re-writing the entire bill.

Bill - A written proposal to create or change a law. Most bills can become a law only if two-fifths of the members elected to each chamber vote for it.

Budget - A bill that determines the state's taxes and spending. Budget bills generally begin in the House.

Committee on Committees - A group of legislative leaders that assigns each bill to the appropriate committee for study.

Calendar - A list of bills that have had one reading and are ready for a second reading (to become a law, bills must have three readings).

Constitutional Majority - Half of all the members of a chamber, plus one. A constitutional majority is needed to pass certain types of bills as well as to override a governor's veto.

Floor - Where each chamber meets. The term is also used to refer to each chamber as a whole, such as, "sending a bill to the House floor."

Orders of the Day - A list of bills and resolutions that are ready in each chamber to be debated and/or adopted that day.

Rules Committee - A group of legislative leaders and other members that prepares the Orders of the Day.

Simple Majority - Half of all the votes cast, plus one.

Statute - Another word for a law.

Veto - The governor's rejection of a bill passed by the General Assembly. If each chamber then approves the bill again by a constitutional majority vote, the veto is overridden and the bill becomes law.

Advocacy can take place year-round, but a majority of the legislative action in turning a bill into a law takes place during the months of January to May.

The 2026 legislative calendar has not yet been released. We will provide this information as it is made available.



Why Advocate

If you believe that you have a profession, not just a job.

If you're tired of other professions dictating what we can and can't do.

If you want to protect your patients and the public from "policy makers".

If you think your degree is worth being known as more than just a tech.

If you want to send the message that our profession matters.

Because you're either at the table or you're on the menu.

To find your Kentucky legislator, visit the Legislative Research Commission (LRC) website's "Find Your Legislator" tool at [Legislative Research Commission \(.gov\)](https://lrc.ky.gov/). This tool allows you to enter your address to find your State Senator and State Representative, or you can search by county or district.

Once you have identified your legislators, the LRC website can provide links to their contact pages.

Prefer to call and leave a message? You can always do that on the legislative message line at 1-800-372-7181.

Basic Ways to Advocate

Now that we know a little more about the legislative process, how to find our legislators, what part of the process our bill is at, and the key talking points for our bill, we are ready to participate in some advocacy activities!

The Power of Personal Stories

When writing an email—or reaching out to a legislator in any way—it is essential to share a personal story. Facts and data are important, but stories bring policy issues to life. Explaining how you, your patients, or people you know have been affected by limited access to oral health care makes the issue real and relatable.

Legislators hear statistics every day, but a personal story puts a face on the problem. It transforms policy from an abstract issue into something that impacts their constituents directly. That human connection is one of the most powerful tools you can use in advocacy.

Sample Email to Legislator

(Note: Replace the bracketed sections with your own information. Feel free to adjust the tone and add any personal details about your office, community involvement, or patients to make it more meaningful.)

SUBJECT: Scheduling Request: [Insert Your Name]

Dear Senator/Representative [Insert Last Name],

I am reaching out on behalf of [Office Name] in [City/County]. We proudly provide dental services to constituents in your district and employ [of employees].

As a member of the Kentucky Dental Association, I would like to invite you to visit our office for a tour and the chance to meet several of our staff at a time that is convenient for you. I would also welcome the opportunity to discuss key issues affecting dentistry in your district and across the Commonwealth.

[Office Name] has been serving the [City/County] community for [# of years in business], and we are proud to provide high-quality dental care to our patients each day.

We are equally proud to be an employer in your district, creating professional careers for many of your constituents and fostering a positive workplace for our employees.

Please let us know a time that would work best for your visit. You may contact me directly at [Insert Phone #] or [Insert Email].

Thank you for your service to our district and to the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

[Your Full Name]
[Title/Role]
[Office Name]

How to Develop a Relationship with Your Legislator

It is very important to develop strong and lasting relationships with your member of Congress. Below are some ways you can begin to create a relationship:

- Host a home fundraiser for an KDA-supported Legislator.
- Meet with your Legislator in Frankfort and back home.
- Invite your Legislator to tour your dental office.
- Invite him or her to a local dental organization meeting.
- Attend town hall meetings, roundtable discussions and political rallies.
- Follow your Legislator on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook.
- Sign up for email alerts and newsletters from your lawmaker's website.
- Volunteer for their campaign.
- Write an op-ed about dental care and mention your Legislator's leadership on the issue.
- When an important issue arises, call your congressional office and talk with the health care legislative assistant.
- Attend fundraisers, golf outings and other events hosted by your Legislator.
- If you serve on a civic or community group, offer to be a liaison with the representative's office and keep their district office informed of any big issues or events.
- If your Legislator gets on a new committee or wins a prestigious award send him or her a letter of congratulations.
- Follow up with thank you notes after meetings or events.

10 Steps to Composing Effective Letters and Emails

Congressional offices receive more than 250,000 pieces of mail a year and only have a small staff to manage responses. Form letters are a great way to show large support for an issue, but unique and individualized letters will receive more attention. Here are some steps that will help your letter or email get noticed:

- **Identify yourself as a constituent.** Put your name and address on any email, fax or letter. Congressional offices will only respond to their own constituents.
- **Always be respectful and be sure to use proper titles.** Be sure that you address a Senator as Senator; not Congressman or Congresswoman.
- **Be brief.** Members of Congress and their staff have limited time and are handling multiple issues simultaneously. Ensure that your argument is clear and concise.
- **Establish credibility.** You are an important health care provider in your community, and you understand the unique challenges that affect your profession.
- **Personalize your message.** Do not fall into the trap of just repeating fact sheets, but actually tell a short story of how this issue has personally affected you or your practice.
- **Do not use threats or lie.** Members of Congress take extreme offense when they are threatened with votes or donations. Threats will immediately end the relationship.
- **Make the letter actionable.** Ask your lawmaker to do something. For example, ask him or her to sponsor a piece of legislation.
- **Make sure that your message is timely.** If a vote on an important issue is coming up make sure to send that letter or email immediately. Regular mail takes at least two weeks just to get to a congressional office.
- **Always include contact information.** This will ensure a timely response.
- **Spread the word.** Send your letter to fellow dentists and colleagues in your area. Encourage them to follow your example and compose a similar message.

Building Relationships with Legislators

Strong relationships are at the heart of effective policy change. One of the best ways to build those connections is by meeting directly with your legislators. A personal visit not only allows you to share your perspective but also helps your legislator see you as a trusted resource on oral health issues.

Steps for a Successful Legislative Visit

1. Schedule Your Meeting

- Call or email your legislator's office to request a meeting.
- Be flexible with times—they often have very busy schedules.
- Let the office know you are a constituent and what topic you'd like to discuss.

2. Do Your Homework

- Learn about your legislator: their committees, interests, and past positions on health or dental issues.
- Understand the specific issue or bill you want to discuss and be able to explain it simply.

3. Prepare Your Message

- Keep your talking points clear, concise, and no longer than 2–3 key messages.
- Use real-life examples or stories to show how oral health policies impact Kentuckians.
- Decide your “ask”—what action you'd like the legislator to take (support a bill, consider funding, etc.).

4. Bring Materials

- Prepare a one-page handout with key facts, data, and your contact information.
- This gives your legislator something to refer back to after the meeting.

5. During the Meeting

- Be on time, courteous, and respectful of their schedule.
- Introduce yourself as a constituent and explain your role in oral health.
- Share your key points, focusing on the human impact, not just statistics.
- Ask for their support or position and listen carefully to their response.

6. Be Flexible and Positive

- Sometimes you may meet with staff instead of the legislator—treat staff as equally important.
- If questions arise that you cannot answer, offer to follow up rather than guessing.

7. Follow Up

- Send a thank-you note or email within a few days, restating your key points and appreciation.

- Provide any promised information or resources.
- Keep the relationship going with updates or invitations to visit your dental practice or community events.

Legislative Visits: Do's & Don'ts

✓ Do's

- **Schedule early & be flexible** with meeting times.
- **Know your legislator**—their committees, interests, and district.
- **Keep it simple**—focus on 2–3 key talking points.
- **Use stories** to show the real impact of oral health policies.
- **Bring a one-page handout** with facts and your contact info.
- **Be respectful of time**—meetings may be short.
- **Treat staff as allies**—they often advise the legislator.
- **Follow up** with a thank-you note and any promised information.

✗ Don'ts

- Don't overwhelm with too many statistics or details.
- Don't assume they know about dentistry—explain clearly.
- Don't argue if they disagree—listen respectfully and stay professional.
- Don't forget to ask for their support (be clear about your “ask”).
- Don't leave without providing your contact information.
- Don't let the relationship end after one meeting—stay connected.

Advocating Through Social Media

Another easy and effective way to advocate is through social media—something anyone can do. As we've seen in recent elections and public movements, social media can be a powerful tool for promoting ideas and raising awareness. When used thoughtfully, it can help amplify your advocacy efforts and reach audiences far beyond your immediate circle.

Here are some tips for using social media to strengthen your advocacy:

1. **Share Credible Information** – Post facts, articles, and resources from trusted sources.
2. **Tell Stories** – Personal stories connect with people more than statistics alone.
3. **Use Visuals** – Photos, graphics, and short videos draw more attention than text-only posts.
4. **Engage Respectfully** – Respond to comments and questions in a positive, professional way.
5. **Use Hashtags & Tags** – Tag organizations, legislators, and use relevant hashtags to increase reach.
6. **Be Consistent** – Regular posting keeps oral health issues visible and part of the conversation.
7. **Encourage Action** – Ask followers to share, comment, or contact their legislators on key issues.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY



- GRABBING/KEEPING ATTENTION
- STRONG/CREDIBLE ARGUMENTS BACKED BY CREDIBLE DATA
- NARRATIVE
- EMPATHY
- IDENTIFICATION

Another way to help...



Kentucky Dental Political Action Committee (KDPAC) strives to enhance the effectiveness of KDA's grassroots lobbying by mobilizing dentists to gain the legislative support of key officeholders for dental issues.

KDPAC, is the bipartisan voice of thousands of dentists who care deeply about their patients and their profession. We educate dentists about the importance of political action and help elect congressional candidates who support dentistry. By supporting KDPAC, you keep the profession of dentistry strong and its principles uncompromised.

Through the financial contributions of member dentists, KDPAC supports congressional candidates who understand the importance of dentistry and its contribution to overall health. Regardless of party affiliation, KDPAC supports candidates who will advocate for dentists and patients.

Now More Than Ever, Our Profession Needs A Voice in Government

Our system of government depends on the wisdom and integrity of elected officials., They, in turn, represent us best when they are exposed to and held accountable by an informed and active public.

Now more than ever, dental professionals must take an active role to see that congressional reforms of American health care support cost-effective, high-quality dental services. You can help by supporting KDPAC. Each dollar you give improves the chances that informed and capable people will be elected to Congress to enact responsible reforms in America's health service delivery system.

Access and Attention: A Key to Political Success

Healthcare in the United States has unfortunately evolved into a complex and intricate network of legislation and regulation. Legislation approved today can vastly change the future course of a profession — *our profession*. It is the responsibility of the profession itself and its members to keep lawmakers fully informed and cognizant of the key issues that may directly impact us.

To provide the needed information to our lawmakers, it is necessary to gain *access and attention*. KDPAC is designed to do just that — to gain access and obtain the attention of lawmakers.

By providing campaign contributions to a carefully selected number of candidates, KDPAC helps ensure the re-election of lawmakers who have been sensitive to the needs of the dental profession. Our support for these candidates guarantees that Oral Health is well-represented in Congress.

**You do not have to be
KDA member or even a
dentist to contribute to
KDPAC!**