



## **We Are All Advocates, Although Some of Us May Also Be Realtors**

*This issue of the Voice® is written by SNA Public Policy Advisor Brian Lindberg, Vice President of Health and Aging Policy with [Healthsperien LLC](#) in Washington, DC.*

We all know the real estate maxim, Location, Location, Location. But I am a public policy advisor, not a realtor, so my maxim is Relationships, Relationships, Relationships!

Advocacy is an ongoing process based on relationships between policymakers, advocates, issue experts, and concerned citizenry. As SNA members, our expertise in disability and aging law and our duty to our clients require us to be aware of challenges that affect our clientele and our profession. We need to ensure that systems and policies are responsive and effective for our clients, their families, and our communities. That is why the SNA has worked to develop a public policy strategy. Our strategy has enabled us to make positive contributions to special needs law and policies at the federal level. For example, the SNA advocated for and influenced provisions of the ABLE Act, the Special Needs Trust Fairness Act, SECURE and [SECURE 2.0](#), to name [recent accomplishments](#).

These accomplishments were made possible by the sustained action of SNA members, especially those who serve on the Public Policy Committee. However, you don't have to be an SNA member to have a relationship with your elected officials. Below are a few guidelines to keep in mind as you start rolling your advocacy ball. In addition, SNA has several helpful resources on its website under the [Public Policy tab](#).

1. You have the right as a citizen to speak to your elected representatives
2. You can meet with your representative or senator in the district (locally) or in Washington, DC, at their Capitol Hill office.
3. Remember, these are not high-pressure meetings, but simply a chance to introduce yourself, your work, and your perspective to the people representing you in Washington. A positive relationship with policymakers on the Hill can help the SNA advance its policy priorities and improve the lives of our clients.
4. Prepare a brief "elevator speech" in which you describe your area of expertise, who you or your clients are, and your perspective.
5. Offer one or two stories to bring your clients to life for the members of Congress and the staff in your meeting.
6. If you are discussing a specific piece of legislation, point out how the legislation addresses the problem you and your client are facing. Emphasize that a solution exists; a credible solution helps elicit support from the legislator for your issue.
7. Use the SNA talking points to help you explain the legislative proposal.
8. Be ready with the "ask": We often ask members of Congress to co-sponsor the legislation we support.
9. Ask the person with whom you meet about their priorities and work in the disability and health areas.
10. Thank the person for their time and offer to be available as a resource in the future. Leave the SNA one-pager and your business card with the office.

11. Follow up promptly with an email with any information you offered to provide. Also, if the legislation in question develops, such as being referred to a committee or a hearing, let the legislative office know.

My Relationships, Relationships, Relationships maxim was amply confirmed for us at the SNA's Hill Day this March in Washington, DC. The Hill Day coincided with the SNA's annual Spring meeting. Many of our members participated in the Hill Day, which involved a webinar and in-person training, appointments set up beforehand, and a folder of materials for participants and "leave behind" materials for Hill offices. The folder included the following resources:

- SNA Brochure
- Supporting Individuals with Disabilities One-pager
- DAC Fairness Act One-pager
- DAC Fairness Act Talking Points
- Hill Visit Outline
- Capitol Hill Map

Here is a sample of comments from SNA Members who were Hill Day participants:

It was a very positive experience; I definitely recommend continuing. Staff seemed grateful for the info and to know that we were available as a resource on special needs.

Staffer looking for Republican interest in cosponsoring bill. Please contact her directly with GOP support.

I met with staff whose mom was a special ed teacher so she's familiar with the disability community.

Staff were surprised and grateful to learn about specific programs that would be unavailable to persons with disabilities because of their CDB/DAC payments.

Member requested real person data and stories.

The staffer expressed concern about the financial burden on the state (Medicaid) as a result of the legislation. We explained that the legislation is likely revenue neutral.

That was such an enriching experience!

Following Hill Day, a member of Congress from Michigan expressed interest in taking the lead in introducing our Disabled Adult Child (DAC) Fairness Act in the House of Representatives. In addition, the Senate Finance Committee investigative counsel expressed interest in the bill. This is good news! We are thrilled with our progress due to Hill Day and hope to report on this soon.

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