



Advocacy 101 Tips and Action Plan

Created by the AMA-MSS Committee on Legislation and Advocacy (COLA)

How to be an effective advocate before/during/after Hill visits

- **Know the issues and who will speak on them.** Go in with a plan on who in the group is going to speak/advocate for each specific policy to be efficient and avoid talking over each other. Consider assigning a leader to call on certain individuals.
- **Develop an “elevator speech”** 30 seconds to 1 minute to keep your audience attentive and practice with a timer.
- **Personal sentiments/anecdotes are essential.** Lawmakers share those stories with their constituents. Emotions and stories about patients are more powerful than statistics when communicating with legislators and medical students have a unique lens that we can share with them. Anticipate questions from your representative/senator and prepare researched answers
- **Do your research,** know what issues your representative/senator is active on, and where they stand on the issues. How have they voted in the past? Share some gratitude if the representative has previously acted on policy issues or supports the American Medical Association’s legislative priorities.
 - If this is a bill being reintroduced, was your representative or senator previously a co-signer?
- **Connect to your audience** by finding shared values. You may disagree with a lawmaker’s previous voting history, but you can spin a policy issue in a unique perspective.
- **Ask for feedback.** At the end of a meeting, it is okay to ask whether this issue is something that the legislator/staffer can see themselves working on. Staffers will generally be honest with you. Also, always ask if they have any unanswered questions.
- **Follow up after the meeting.** Ask the staff member you meet with for their contact information and send a thank you email after your meeting. Always share your gratitude and continue to apply social pressure. It takes time to get meaningful results in government.
 - Make sure to provide the member of Congress or their staff what the best way to deliver the MAC leave behind to them. **You can find this leave behind document in your action kit!**
- **Stay involved.** After your legislative meeting, consider sharing your policy passions via social media or by publishing an op-ed.

Schedule your own meeting

- Unable to make the Congressional meeting? Schedule one on your own time as a constituent by visiting your Member of Congress’ website and calling or emailing their office with your request.
 - You can find your Federal District Representative by entering your Zip Code [here](#).
 - You can find your two federal Senators [here](#).
 - When attempting to schedule a meeting, be polite, yet persistent.
- Your action plan:
 - Know the issue
 - Provide the facts and present a personal story to the representative/senator
 - Confirm the lawmaker’s position
 - Drop a leave behind with the message/ask to the lawmaker on next steps

Helpful tips to run a smooth virtual meeting

- **Meet as a group in advance** to discuss who will introduce the group, who will speak on which issues, and brainstorm questions you wish to ask during the meeting. (Understand it may not be possible for every student to talk during each meeting.)
- **Join Zoom rooms 5 minutes early** and don't be discouraged if legislators and staffers are running late to the meeting.
- **Keep your video on**, if possible with bandwidth availability, to personalize the meeting.
- **Take a "group photo" screenshot** at the end of the virtual meeting and include it with a summary of the meeting when you follow-up, but make sure to ask the legislator or staffer if they are okay with it!
 - If you post the photo on social media, be sure to tag the representative you met with!

Get Involved with COLA!

- The Committee on Legislation and Advocacy (COLA) is a Medical Student Section (MSS) Standing Committee dedicated to educating the MSS on AMA policy priorities and encouraging related advocacy opportunities. The Committee is comprised of three subcommittees (Advocacy and Engagement; Legislation; and Policy, Development, and Education) that work on a variety of projects. COLA prepares a monthly newsletter, "COLA Corner," that breaks down current and important topics in health policy and features a MSS advocate of the month. Committee members create educational programming for MSS meetings; form relationships with region and chapter leaders to support local, state, and federal advocacy efforts; and provide expertise and content creation for the Medical Student Advocacy Conference (MAC) and National Advocacy Week (NAW).
- Students can apply for an AMA-MSS Standing Committee twice a year - in June for a one-year term and in December for a 6-month term. You can read more about each Standing Committee [here](#) and submit your application now!