



A GUIDE TO

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVOCACY



NABHO
ADVOCATING SINCE 1997

LEGISLATIVE PERSONNEL

Administrative Assistant (AA) – AA's are the first point of contact when calling a senator's office. They are in charge of scheduling and conveying messages to the senator. They may monitor the senator's emails and respond on their behalf. They are usually able to respond to general questions.

Legislative Aide (LA) – LA's do a great deal of research and help the senator with bill drafting. They support the senator in hearings on their bills and on the floor during debate. They can answer questions with much more detail and can usually convey the senator's position on any given bill.

Committee Clerk (CC) – If the senator is a committee chair, they will have a committee clerk who is responsible for maintaining the hearing records, sending details to transcribers, and taking care of many other committee-specific tasks.

Legal Counsel (LC) – Committee chairs also have at least one legal counsel who helps with any legal questions or concerns related to the bills before the committee.

Research Analyst (RA) – Some committees may have a research assistant instead of legal counsel. Their duties are related to researching any bills coming before the committee.

OTHER OFFICES IN THE LEGISLATURE

Legislative Fiscal – This office is comprised of analysts who are assigned to the different subject matters that come before the committees. Their job is to help develop fiscal notes which demonstrate the cost or fiscal impact of bills. They can provide a great deal of information to senators and staff.

Legislative Research – These individuals help senators and staff do in-depth research on any subject submitted by a senator's office.

Clerk of the Legislature – The Clerk's office is in charge of daily operations of the legislature. The Clerk oversees debate during session. They receive and maintain reports submitted by various agencies and fulfill myriad other duties related to the official business of the legislature.

Transcribers – Transcribers transcribe all official proceedings of the legislature, including hearings and debate during session.

Ombudsman/Public Counsel – The Ombudsmen/Public Counsel are available to help citizens who are having issues with governmental agencies.

Performance Audit – At the request of a senator, this division may audit any state agency or program specifically identified by a senator.

LEGISLATIVE STANDING COMMITTEES

The fourteen standing committees are:

1. Agriculture
2. Appropriations
3. Banking, Commerce, and Insurance
4. Business and Labor
5. Education
6. General Affairs
7. Government, Military, and Veterans Affairs
8. Health and Human Services
9. Judiciary
10. Natural Resources
11. Nebraska Retirement Systems
12. Revenue
13. Transportation and Telecommunications
14. Urban Affairs

HEARING TIPS

If you are testifying before the committee in person, bring 15 print copies of your testimony. You will hand your testimony to the committee clerk or a page prior to sitting down at the testifier's table. It is helpful to have copies for the senators so that if your time is cut short, the members of the committee may read your full testimony and even ask questions about it.

Testimony is often limited to 3 to 5 minutes. Be prepared to shorten your comments. Committees use a light system to indicate your time remaining: Green for start, Yellow for 1 minute remaining, and Red for stop. It is wise to respect the light system!

Don't be afraid of senators' questions. Remember you are a resource for their deliberations. Answer honestly; that means that if you don't know the answer, say so and offer to find out and follow up after the hearing.

SUBMITTING COMMENTS ONLINE

The legislature has an online portal where you can submit your comments for the record. This feature is available on the Legislature's website and serves to facilitate public input on legislation. It allows for submission of written comments regarding pending legislation. To access this feature, go to www.nebraskalegislature.gov, search for the bill for which you wish to submit a statement, and click the corresponding button near the top of the bill page. This feature only appears once a bill has been scheduled for a public hearing.

When submitting comments online, citizens will have the option to request the comments be included in the official public hearing record as an exhibit, provided the comments are submitted and verified **prior to 8:00 am CST on the day of the public hearing.**

MEETING WITH YOUR SENATOR

During the legislative session, senators have many demands on their time. When you call for an appointment, recognize that you may not be able to schedule a meeting right away, and know that the duration of any meeting will be limited. When your meeting occurs, be respectful and concise. If you are speaking to a particular bill, remember that senators may not know much about the topic. If it is not their bill or in their committee, they just don't have the time to read everything, so provide as much background as you can stating why you support or oppose the legislation. If you have any supporting documents, it is helpful to provide them for the staff.

Be sure to send a follow-up thank you note.

Similar protocols are used for contact by phone or email. Do not be offended if you are asked to speak with the Legislative Aide. They take everything to the senator for their consideration, and you may be able to spend a bit more time with them.

Be respectful when speaking with senators and staff, especially if you are opposing their viewpoint or legislation. State your views, ask for their consideration, and offer to be of additional assistance, should they need it.

DO NOT SEND FORM EMAILS! Use your own words. When senators email boxes fill up with form emails, they may keep a tally of how many come through, but cookie-cutter messages have less impact than even a brief message, mindfully written in your own words.

Conclude the call or email by thanking the senator or staffer for their time and consideration.

RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

The legislature's website is filled with everything you want or need to know. The calendar for the session is on the home page along with bill search, daily agenda, hearing schedules, and the list goes on and on. Visit www.nebraskalegislature.gov or scan the QR code below to view the legislature's website.



You may also sign up to receive the Unicameral Update via email or in hard copy. This publication contains interesting articles about the senators, tips on testifying, terms used in the legislature, hearing schedules, and updates on legislation. It is a free publication.

Nebraska Television Network provides gavel-to-gavel coverage of all legislative floor action and hearings. You may access this on the legislature's home page.

SAMPLE LETTER



Building strong alliances that ensure quality behavioral health services, including substance use & mental health services, are accessible to everyone in our state.

March 13, 2023

LETTER OF SUPPORT: LB 85

Chairperson Hansen and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

The Nebraska Association of Behavioral Health Organizations requests this Letter of Support be included as a part of the public record for LB 85 introduced by Senator Jen Day.

The Nebraska Association of Behavioral Health Organizations (NABHO) represents fifty-two organizations statewide that include community behavioral health providers, hospitals, Regional Behavioral Health Authorities, and consumers. We work to raise awareness and build alliances that support access to behavioral health care for everyone across our state.

Whenever agencies can find ways to streamline administrative processes and improve services for taxpayers it is a win/win for all involved. By amending our current Medicaid State Plan Amendment to implement Express Lane Eligibility (ELE) to automatically enroll eligible children who are receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) health coverage insures that children will access important physical and behavioral health care in a timely manner. Taking care of our children's health must be a priority for our state; healthy and well-fed children do better in school.

Express Lane Eligibility was originally authorized by the Children's Health Insurance

Program Reauthorization Act of 2009 (CHIPRA) to create a more simplified process and

reduce administrative costs.

Our Association encourages the Health and Human Services Committee to advance LB 85 to General File.

Sincerely,

Annette Dubas

Executive Director

The Nebraska Association of Behavioral Health Organizations

Nebraska Association of Behavioral Health Organizations
www.nabho.org : 1327 H St, #309 : 531-500-4162

CONNECT WITH US



Nicki Behmer Popp, Executive Director

✉ ed@nabho.org

☎ 531-500-4162



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1327 H St, Ste 309, Box 16,
Lincoln, NE 68508