

Advocate for Your Cause: Contact Your Legislator

A step-by-step guide to finding, contacting and speaking with your legislator

For maximum impact at Mental Health Advocacy Day, meet with your legislator! Introduce yourself and discuss mental health policy and budget issues in Kansas. Below is a guide to help navigate this process.

STEP 1

Find your state legislators

- Go to https://openstates.org/find_your_legislator/
- Enter your home address in the box.
- The names of your House Representative and your State Senator will appear under STATE. The Representative is the “lower” chamber and Senator is “higher”. If you click on their name, you will be directed to another page that has their contact information, including the phone number to their statehouse office.
- If you know your legislators by name, you can get their contact information at www.kslegislature.org under the *Legislators* tab at the top. The House and Senate rosters are listed alphabetically.

STEP 2

Schedule a meeting

- Make appointments with your Representative and Senator now.
- Call their offices and request a meeting for Advocacy Day or other days when you can meet with them. You can also plan to meet them at the lunch being served on First Floor.
- The office assistants are your gateway to the legislator. Always be very polite!

STEP 3

Asking for an appointment

“Hello, my name is _____, and I live in Senator/Representative _____’s district. I would like to make an appointment on _____ (date) because I will be in the Capitol to talk for about 15 minutes about issues related to Mental Health Advocacy Day that are important to me and others in the district.”

BE SURE TO WRITE DOWN THE TIME AND OFFICE NUMBER FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT. Carry the office phone number with you as well.

STEP 4

Preparing to meet your legislators

The Kansas Mental Health Coalition prepares issue papers to be available for participants along with our CONSENSUS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS document. These are on the website.

You can read articles about your legislators or check out their website or social media – what do they do for a living? What are the issues they talk about in the press? What is their background and priorities?

STEP 5

What do I talk about?

- Pick one or two issues that are important to you. Use KMHC documents or bring your own.
- Share that paper with the legislators first.
- Tell your short story, recovery story, or example.

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- Ask for support and funding for the programs that are important to you.
- Be prepared to provide the bill number or name of the program and whether or not the bill has passed any committee or chamber in the process. You can look it up at www.kslegislature.org or ask someone from the Coalition to help you.

Six talking tips

1. Know your stuff. You know your story, but practice anyway. Keep it short.
2. Be on time. A little early is better.
3. Get to the point. Keep it brief.
4. Provide something in writing such as the issue papers or a letter. Email or mail it.
5. Lobby one issue at a time, whenever possible.
6. Be reasonable, courteous and tactful. Say thank you.

STEP 7

What if they cannot meet?

- Unfortunately, it is common for legislators to have last minute changes to their schedules that force them to change appointments.
- Give the office assistant your **CELL PHONE NUMBER** to call you if time opens up for a meeting, or if you could catch them in the hall for a short introduction.
- Personally follow up with the office assistant later and ask if any openings have come up for a meeting.

STEP 8

Cheat Sheets, taking notes and answering questions

- It is fine to have your own notes with items you want to cover in the meeting.
- You can certainly take notes on the topics you are discussing and points you want to remember.
- If a Legislator asks for further information, and you do not have it, it is fine to say "I will get that for you later". Do not forget to do what you promise to do. We can help!

STEP 9

Follow up and after action

After your meetings with your legislators, there are two things you should do...

- Jot down comments from talking to your legislators (comments they made regarding mental health services, Medicaid, substance use disorders or other). Share that information with KMHC and talk about whether or not a follow up contact should occur from you or from someone else with the Coalition.
- Write a thank you note to your legislator for meeting with you.

Contact:

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