

Advocate for Your Cause: Contact Your Legislator

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

To make a maximum impact on Mental Health Advocacy Day, we are asking consumers, family members, providers and advocates to meet with their legislator that day to 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 Senator will appear. If you click on their name, you will be directed to another page that has their contact information.
- 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 the day or days when you can meet with them at the State Capitol for Mental Health Advocacy Day, or perhaps at another date when they are locally available.
- 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’ll be coming to Topeka on Thursday, March 14, for Mental Health Advocacy Day. I would like to make an appointment sometime that day to talk for about 15 minutes about issues that are important to me and others in the district.”

BE SURE TO WRITE DOWN THE TIME AND ROOM NUMBER FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT. Note the office phone number so you can call later.

Report your appointments to KMHC on the website at the link called: [2019 KMHC Advocacy Day Legislative Appointment Log for Registered Participants](#).

STEP 4

Preparing to meet your legislators

The Kansas Mental Health Coalition prepares issue papers to be available for participants prior to coming to Topeka and distributes them to everyone at registration. Your packet will include copies to give to your legislators.

You can read some articles about your legislators – what do they do for a living? What are the issues they talk about in the press? This will help you to have an idea of their background and priorities.

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STEP 5

Getting into the capitol

- Entrance to Capitol: There is only one entrance to the State Capitol and that is the Visitor Entrance on the North side, from 8th street.
- You will go through a metal detector. No knives, any metal objects, large key rings, etc. Cell phones, belts with buckles, keys and change must all go in a container and through an x-ray machine. Avoid wearing belts with lots of metal or lots of metal jewelry.

STEP 6

What do I talk about?

- Pick one issue that is important to you.
- Use the documents provided by KMHC to assist you.
- Share that paper with the legislators first.
- Tell your short story, recovery story, or example.
- Ask for support and funding for the programs that are important to you.
- Be prepared to provide the bill number – if you are asking for support for legislation – 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.
2. Be on time. A little early is better.
3. Get to the point. Keep it brief.
4. Bring issue papers, leave them with the legislators.
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 visit their office that day and ask if any openings have come up for a meeting.
- Leave a note introducing yourself as a constituent and include your contact information and the Advocacy Day documents.

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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. Note cards or small notebooks are terrific for this.
- 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.

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.

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