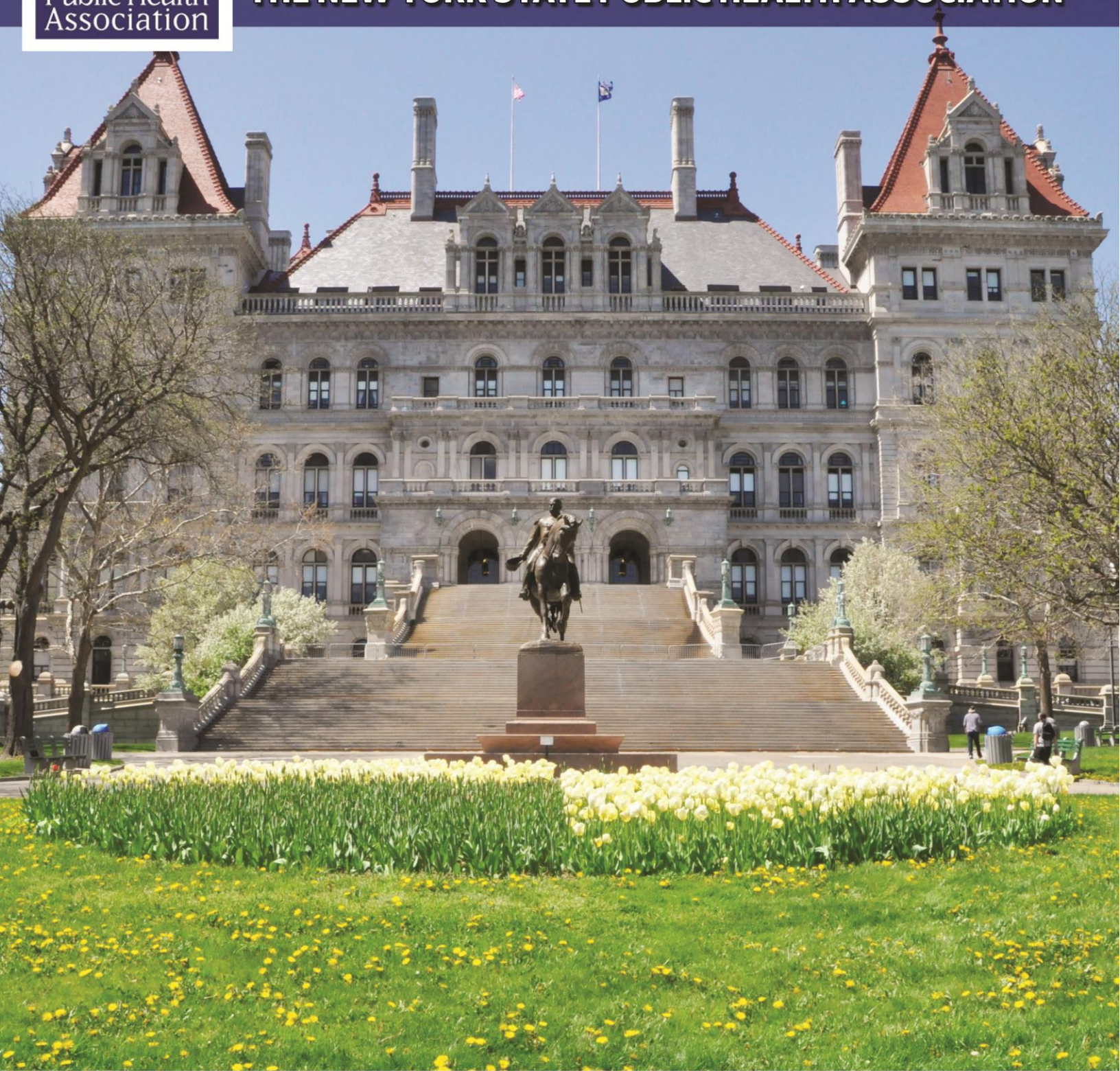


ADVOCATES' HANDBOOK

THE NEW YORK STATE PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION



GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE PUBLIC HEALTH ADVOCACY

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The New York State Public Health Association

NYSPHA Legislative Committee

The Policy and Advocacy Committee is open to all NYSPHA members.

Responsibilities of the Policy and Advocacy Committee may include:

- ❖ Identification of legislative priorities
- ❖ Researching the background of legislative issues
- ❖ Screening legislative and regulatory issues and potential positions
- ❖ Formulating NYSPHA position papers
- ❖ Selecting among various policy options and making recommendations to the Board of Directors
- ❖ Submitting Letters to the Editor and op-eds to local media
- ❖ Providing testimony to legislatures
- ❖ Meeting with legislators to educate them about NYSPHA priority bills

Selection of NYSPHA Legislative Priorities

Legislative priorities are selected on an annual and as needed basis by recommendation of the Policy and Advocacy Committee to the Board of Directors.

Issues are screened for:

- ❖ Salience to public health, public health practice and New York State
- ❖ Timeliness
- ❖ Magnitude of need
- ❖ Consistency with NYSPHA and APHA mission, vision and values, goals and objectives
- ❖ Social Value
- ❖ Feasibility for passage
- ❖ Potential impact based on evidence

Advocating for Public Health

What is advocacy?

The following is excerpted from the American Public Health Association's Advocate's Handbook:

What is an advocate and why should individuals committed to public health be involved in advocacy?

Officially, an advocate is a person who argues a cause – a supporter or defender. To advocate is to act in support of a particular issue or cause. Being a public health advocate gives you the opportunity to influence the way the public and policy-makers think and act on public health policies. Most of the strategies and resources employed to preserve and promote the public's health is dependent on political decisions.

How does being an advocate differ from being a lobbyist?

A lobbyist is generally paid to advocate for public policy in support of a group, organization or industry. To be a lobbyist, you have to be registered and comply with federal and state law requiring submission of regular reports detailing lobbying activity. Anyone can be an advocate. As an advocate, you are exercising your right to participate in the democratic process.

“All politics is local.” NYSPHA Members and the Development of Sound Public Policy.

This often repeated phrase holds true. The power of grassroots advocacy comes from individual action and groups of committed constituents joining together to provide policy-makers with the expertise they need to make decisions. NYSPHA members are committed to supporting what is good for the health of New Yorkers.

At all levels of government, policymakers cannot know all of their constituents. But those constituents that make an effort to develop a relationship with and act as a resource to their elected or appointed leaders can have a real impact. Introduce your policy-makers to work that you do in the district or state so the legislator knows how public health serves his or her

constituents. As a NYSPHA member you can make a contribution to the development of sound public policy. Initiating and maintaining a relationship with your policy-makers is the access point to the policy-making process.

Working together in coalition with other committed individuals is also an effective way to encourage legislators to support a particular public health initiative. Organized groups of constituents with a common goal and a broad knowledge base who are willing and committed to sharing their experiences and knowledge about public health can hold great influence with legislators as they make their decisions about sponsoring or supporting legislation.

The goal of advocacy is sound public policy.

Putting a Face on Public Health Issues

What we as public health professionals do every day to better the lives of New Yorkers is largely a mystery to the public and to many policy makers. Much of our strength as advocates arises from the stories we can tell about real people and how their lives are affected by public health programs or how lives could be improved through legislative action. As NYSPHA members and public health professionals, we can tell the stories in a way that makes public health real. We are used to arming ourselves with statistics and epidemiological studies. We also need to be prepared to tell the stories behind the numbers. In other words, how people are really affected by adverse public health conditions. Often these stories live longer and are far more effective than data books and fact sheets.

Researching the Issues

NYSPHA as an organization depends on its members to help translate public health issues they see in their daily professional lives into a set of legislative and policy priorities for the organization. Based on what members bring forward through the Policy and Advocacy Committee and the Board of Directors, NYSPHA is able to formulate an annual legislative priority list that will help focus attention and generate the kinds of actions, initiative, and issues forums that can advance critical bills. Passing one law, such as the seat belt requirement or the ban on smoking in public places has saved thousands of lives and can have the greatest impact on the health of New Yorkers.

SEE APPENDIX

Writing a Good Letter

NYSPHA will periodically send Action Alert e-mails urging members to reach out to their legislators about a certain issue. A letter (or e-mail) to a legislator can be very effective in influencing the outcome of a piece of legislation. A quick Internet search will help you identify your state and Federal representative.

1. Keep your letter short, clear and professional. A single page is often most effective.
2. Do NOT use a form letter. If given one, change it and personalize it to get the point across that this is an issue you believe in and will make an effort to explain.
3. Address only one topic, issue or bill in your letter. Include the bill number when applicable. Feel free to reference literature.
4. Be sure to time your letter when the issue is alive.
5. Include the recipient's name in the letter as well as on the envelope. Be sure to use the appropriate form of address and the correct spelling.

<p>State senators and Assembly Members are also addressed as follows:</p> <p>The Honorable_____</p> <p>Dear Senator _____,</p> <p>Dear Assemblymember_____,</p>
<p>Letters to the President should be addressed:</p> <p>President_____</p> <p>The White House</p> <p>Washington DC 20500</p> <p>Dear Mr. President,</p>
<p>Letters to the Vice President should be addressed:</p> <p>Vice President_____</p> <p>2203 Dirksen Senate Building</p> <p>Washington DC 10510</p> <p>Dear Mr. Vice President,</p>
<p>The proper way to address a US senator is:</p> <p>The Honorable _____</p> <p>United States Senate</p> <p>Washington DC 20510</p>

Dear Senator _____,

A member of the House of Representatives should be addressed as follows:

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Representative _____,

The Office Visit

An office visit to your legislator is an effective way to influence the policy-making process and to make a lasting connection with your legislator. Most legislators have regular office hours both at their home district and in Albany or Washington, where they and their staff are available to meet with constituents.

If you would like to arrange a meeting:

1. Call the legislator's office and request an appointment with the scheduler. Specify which office you would like to visit (e.g. district office, Albany or Washington).
2. Identify yourself as a constituent and NYSPHA member to the appointment scheduler. Include information about who you are, what you would like to discuss, when you would like to meet, and how many people will be in your party.

Here are some tips for conducting the actual visit to the legislator's office:

1. Prepare for the meeting and have a short fact sheet ready.
2. Arrive on time.
3. If you are meeting with a staff member, do not underestimate the power of the staff member in helping to shape the legislator's opinions and positions on issues.
4. Bring two or three colleagues with you. Before the meeting, elect a primary spokesperson and agree on the points each one of you will discuss.
5. Always introduce yourself and what you do/who you are representing. Explain why you are concerned about an issue and why you have expertise to address the issue.
6. Cover only one or two topics.
7. **Try to deliver your message in three minutes.**
8. Provide actual examples of positive or negative impacts.
9. Do not be argumentative.
10. Be flexible.
11. Offer assistance or further information. Volunteer to serve on advisory groups.
12. Ask for a response in a nice way.
13. Leave a fact sheet.
14. Thank the person for her/his time and courtesy.
15. Report back to NYSPHA as to what happened at the visit.

16. Call or write with information that was requested at the visit.
17. Congratulate yourself for serving as an effective public health advocate!

Serving on Committees, Panels and Workgroups

Volunteering or agreeing to serve on committees, panels and workgroups is a very effective advocacy tool. It's also a great way to stay informed on key issues in particular areas of public health. Here are a few tips for getting involved:

1. Make known your willingness to serve. You can volunteer by writing a letter, letting our colleagues know of your willingness to serve, or attending meetings of related coalitions.
2. It's important to maintain credibility. Be sure you have the facts and do your homework. Understand the committee's charge or purpose.
3. Represent public health well. Offer the strength of your expertise and first hand knowledge.

Offering Expert Testimony

Testifying at hearings is another way to advocate. Hearings and other public meetings are a great opportunity to educate and influence both policy-makers and the public. Often, these hearings are covered by the media, which provides a wider audience for the public health message. NYSPHA will send periodic action alerts to members about these opportunities.

Here are some hints for using these opportunities effectively:

1. Show your support. Write a letter in support of a bill to the committee members and indicate your willingness to testify or work with the committee in other ways.
2. Contact the committee or agency as soon as you hear there are going to be hearings. There may be a limited number of slots and they may go quickly.
3. Make sure you know the procedural rules governing the testimony.
4. Prepare a written statement that includes:
 - a. A title
 - b. A clear statement of positions "I/We support_____."
 - c. Factual arguments, relevant, factual, timely data as evidence to support your position, summaries of studies, research, editorials or news articles.
 - d. A conclusion that basically reviews your position.

Your written statement will be a part of the record of the proceedings and can be longer than your verbal presentation. If possible, use the verbal presentation to summarize your position and use not more than three key points.

5. Do the necessary homework. A successful witness will find out about committee members and their particular interests/histories with the issue before appearing.
- 6. Be precise and concise.**
7. Concentrate on the positive--how to improve the program or what can be done.
8. Avoid scientific and technical jargon. Excessive detail will lose your audience.
9. Remember that policy-makers are looking to learn from your experience.
10. Be polite. Address policy-makers as "Chairman" or "Madame-Chair," "Senator."

How a Bill Becomes a Law

In order to understand how an idea or a bill becomes a law, it is helpful to understand the structure of New York State Government.

The government is composed of three branches,

- ❖ The LEGISLATIVE BRANCH, which makes the laws;
- ❖ The EXECUTIVE BRANCH, which carries out the laws; and
- ❖ The JUDICIAL BRANCH, which interprets the laws.

The Legislative Branch has two houses:

❖ The SENATE

The Senate has 61 members; the Republicans are currently in the majority. Therefore, the presiding officer of the Senate, the President Pro Tem and the Majority leader is a Republican, and the Chairs of the various committees are Republicans. The Minority Leader is a Democrat, and each committee has a Ranking Member who is a Democrat. Each committee is comprised of both Republicans and Democrats, with the Republicans having the majority on each committee.

❖ The ASSEMBLY

The Assembly has 150 members; the Democrats are currently in the majority. Therefore, the presiding officer of the Assembly, the Speaker of the Assembly, is a Democrat, as is the Assembly Majority Leader, and the chairs of the various committees are Democrats. The Minority Leader of the Assembly is a Republican, and each committee has a Ranking Member who is a Republican. Each committee is comprised of both Republicans and Democrats, with the Democrats having the majority on each committee.

To become a law, a bill must pass through both houses of the State Legislature and be signed by the Governor. Both houses use the committee system, where bills are referred to committees covering a specific area of interest, such as health, education or labor.

How a bill becomes a law:

- ❖ An idea is presented. Ideas come from many sources---elected officials themselves, citizens, or special interest groups.
- ❖ A Senator or Assemblymember accepts an idea for bill sponsorship. Bills are drafted, which puts the idea into legal language (also known as a legislative bill draft, or LBD).
- ❖ The bill is assigned to a committee for review. Bills that have more than one area of interest or have the potential to affect the state budget are sent to second or third committees for study, as well. Committees serve the important function of deciding which bills will be heard by the entire house (Assembly or Senate)
If a bill is voted out of a committee, it is common to say that a bill has moved. The bill can move to another committee or to the floor, where it is voted by every member in that house.
- ❖ The bill is then debated and voted on by all the members of one house. If it is passed, it is sent on to the second house.

- ❖ The bill is studied by the appropriate committee(s) in the second house.
- ❖ The bill is then debated and voted on by the second house.
- ❖ If the bill is passed by the second house, it is sent on to the Governor.
- ❖ The bill is reviewed by the Governor. The Governor may sign the bill into law or veto the bill. If vetoed, the bill dies, unless a two-thirds majority in both houses votes to override the veto. Then the bill becomes a law.

In New York State, legislative sessions are two years long. Generally, the legislature recesses at the end of June until January. Proposed bills that are not passed within this time period can be reintroduced in the next session. Note that bill numbers change and the sponsoring legislator may also change from session to session.

Relevant Committees

Many public health-relevant bills will be found in (but are not limited to) the following committees:

- Health ([Assembly/Senate](#))
- Higher Education ([Assembly/Senate](#))
- Education ([Assembly/Senate](#))

APPENDIX

All bills (state and federal) can be found online. If you are unsure of the bill number, feel free to call the sponsoring legislator and ask for the current bill number.

How to look up New York bills on the NYS Assembly website

1. <http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/>

Search by bill number

(A for Assembly, S for Senate). You can search for both Assembly and Senate bills here.

The screenshot shows the 'Bill Search' tab selected. The 'Search by:' section has three radio buttons: 'Bill No' (selected), 'Keyword', and 'Full-Text'. Below this, there is a dropdown menu for the session '2013-14' and a text input field containing 'a7277'. A 'Search' button is located to the right of the input field.

1 bill matched your search criteria:

- [A07277](#) Relates to the use and sale of tobacco at state-operated institutions of the state university of New York

Note that you can also search by keyword.

The result shows that both are the same bill, but are sponsored in both houses.

The screenshot shows the 'Bill Search' tab selected. The 'Search by:' section has three radio buttons: 'Bill No', 'Keyword' (selected), and 'Full-Text'. Below this, there is a dropdown menu for the session '2013-14' and a text input field containing 'tobacco state university'. A 'Search' button is located to the right of the input field.

Searchable keywords

- tobacco
- university

2 bills matched your search criteria:

- [A07277](#) Relates to the use and sale of tobacco at state-operated institutions of the state university of New York
- [S04853](#) Relates to the use and sale of tobacco at state-operated institutions of the state university of New York

For more details, click on the link to the bill for the Bill Summary, Actions, Votes, Sponsor's Memo and Bill Text.

Sample Support Memo



To: Albany Common Councilmember

From: Michael Seserman, New York State Public Health Association President

Date: August 1, 2014

Re: Support Tobacco-Free Zones in City Parks (Ordinance Number 38.52.14)

Please vote in favor of Council Member Applrys' amendment to Section 251-9 of Chapter 251, which will expand current tobacco-free zones to include the entire city park.

Laws that create smoke-free public areas are the most effective intervention to reduce the harms of secondhand smoke. New York State residents deserve the chance to take their children to the playground or spend an afternoon walking through a publicly-funded park without being exposed to the well-documented dangerous effects of tobacco smoke. Expanding the smoke laws is not punitive to current smokers; this law will mostly be enforced by the public. Studies show that tobacco-free zones can encourage people to quit smoking as well as prevent youth from smoking.¹

Tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke (SHS) account for about one in five deaths that are completely preventable. Annually, tobacco leads to the premature deaths of 25,500 people every year in New York State. Secondhand smoke kills an estimated 2,500 New Yorkers every year.² There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.³

Many people think that encountering SHS outdoors is not an issue of concern. However, inhalation of toxic secondhand smoke even in small quantities is damaging to the body over time. A recent study from Stanford University showed that even brief exposure to secondhand smoke *outdoors* can be harmful.⁴

The New York State Public Health Association (NYSPHA) is an affiliate of the American Public Health Association and serves as a statewide organization for members from all disciplines in the public health spectrum including state and county health departments, healthcare, policy and advocacy organizations; community based health and human service programs and workers; academia and research. NYSPHA strongly supports this proposal to help reduce the deadly toll of tobacco use and secondhand smoke.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Smokefree Policies Reduce Smoking," see: http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/secondhand_smoke/protection/reduce_smoking/

² New York State Department of Health, "The Burden of Tobacco Use and Secondhand Smoke," see: http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/tobacco_control/

³ U.S. Surgeon General, "The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General," June 27, 2006, see: <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/secondhandsmoke/factsheet7.html>

⁴ Neil E. Klepeis, Wayne R. Ott, and Paul Switzer, Stanford University, Stanford, CA
Published in the May 2007 edition of the Journal of the Air & Waste Management Association

Useful Links

American Public Health Association Advocacy Website

<http://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/advocacy-for-public-health>

Find your state legislator

http://openstates.org/find_your_legislator/

Capitol Confidential—Times Union Blog from Albany

<http://blog.timesunion.com/capitol/>

Legislative Gazette

[Legislative Gazette](#)