

## A GUIDE TO A VISIT WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

Congressman Tip O'Neil, Speaker of the House once said "All politics is local". This is a completely true statement. Grassroots politics are the most effective method of educating public policy makers on the issues that affect your day to day operations. The following will give you a guide to inviting a legislator. We have included ideas on how to invite the legislator to your facility along with talking points to help facilitate the conversation.

### **INVITE THE LEGISLATOR:**

Inviting legislators and other VIPs into your facility is an excellent opportunity to help current and future decision makers see the quality of services you provide and gain a better understanding of our long term care issues. Many lawmakers have never been inside a long term care facility, or it has been many years since their last visit. They may not understand the complexities of care you provide, the valuable activity programs you offer to enhance resident quality of life, or dedication of your staff to help ensure quality care is provided each and every day.

Each legislator has a website where you will find contact information. If you cannot find the contact information for your legislator it is on the CHCA website [www.cohca.org](http://www.cohca.org) or you can call the Association office. Contact the legislator and give several dates when you could receive them at your facility. CHCA will assist in any way to help make the visit and tour successful.

### **WHAT TO DO PRIOR TO THE VISIT:**

Alert your staff ahead of time that a special visitor will be in the building. They may have ideas and suggestions for activities you can host while he/she is there. Let families know about the visit and offer them the opportunity to be there and talk with the legislator.

### **WHEN THE LEGISLATOR ARRIVES:**

Take a little time to sit in a conference room and discuss major issues with the legislator. Don't use acronyms or medical terminology or assume your visitor knows what you are talking about. The following are talking points you may want to use:

- Ask the legislator about their experience with nursing homes or assisted living.
- Tell the legislator how many employees work in your facility and how many residents live there.
- Explain your resident population. Is it mostly short term rehabilitation, is it a younger population, do you have a population that is largely cognitively impaired.

- Explain your payer source and remind them that statewide 65% of all nursing home residents are dependent on Medicaid to fund to cost of their care. In addition 12% is Medicare and the remainder is managed care, VA and private pay.
- Let the guest know about any awards or recognitions your facility has relating to quality of care. Five Star ratings, CHCA Spotlight on Excellence Awards, and Pay for Performance achievements are just some ideas.
- Tell them how challenging it is to provide care in an innovative way when so restricted by regulations. While we do not expect them to eliminate regulations we want to make the case that surveyors need to be reasonable in their interpretation of the regulation.
- If you have examples of unnecessary costs that were incurred because of the interpretation of a regulation, share that information.
- Let the legislator know that Medicaid does not cover your costs. According to a national study the Colorado Medicaid rates are \$13.57 below the cost of providing care and the cost of meeting the regulations. Remind them that we have very few payer sources who can subsidize this shortfall.
- Be sure to ask question of the legislators to show your interest in their positions on issues. Ask what legislation they are most interested in carrying. If you visited their website you can read the bio. That will give you and better picture of the individual, their interests and their background.

### **THE TOUR:**

- Have your Director of Nursing or Admissions Coordinator accompany you on the tour. Be sure to show off your dining room, talk about any specialized meal functions, opportunities for families to come in and dine with the residents.
- Showcase your activities board and activities center. Talk about community involvement, any outside groups that visit the facility and provide religious services or music concerts, for example. Talk about opportunities you offer to take residents on visits outside the facility.
- Highlight your therapy and other skilled services. Tell the legislator about your return to the community rate.
- Explain that returning to the hospital costs money and what your facility is doing to avoid unnecessary hospital readmissions.
- Be sure to introduce the legislator to staff, residents and families.

- Have someone to take pictures with the legislator and staff or residents. These pictures can be sent to CHCA for our newsletter, put in your newsletter, and given to the legislator for their website or newsletters. Remember to get release forms.

**AFTER THE VISIT:**

- Send a thank you note and pictures you may have taken to the legislator. Offer them the opportunity to return any time and tell them you will be in contact when issues come up that the capitol.
- Send a brief e-mail to CHCA explaining how the tour went and note any conversations of comments of importance.

Remember you are a very important part of the process to influence decision in long term care. Everything you do from the moment you hang up your coat in the morning until you go home at night will be influenced in one way or another by a law or a regulation. Be involved!!!!