FHCA Lobby Days

What you need to know

By Peggy Rigsby

If you’ve been reading any of FHCA’s publications or listening to FHCA leadership during meetings, you’ve likely heard about the Association’s Lobby Days by now. You may also be one of the over 550 FHCA members who have come to Tallahassee during an earlier legislative session and participated in what we used to call "Lobby Wednesday." This grassroots initiative has become so important and popular among the membership that it expands beyond just a single day of the week now, hence the name change to Lobby Days for 2014.

Believe it or not, there are some FHCA members who have never participated in a Lobby Day. Our hope is that with some encouragement, we’ll see those individuals sign up for 2014. I have heard some say that the process seems daunting and/or they are uncomfortable taking part on their own, not knowing what to expect. Those feelings are not uncommon, so I want to challenge each of our experienced Lobby Day attendees to bring a newcomer with you in 2014. Consider a coworker from your facility—maybe your Director of Nursing, a Certified Nursing Assistant or Social Worker, for example. Consider inviting another administrator in your district or even a vendor who has an interest in long term care issues. Make your plans now so that schedules can be coordinated and travel arranged.

Even if you can’t find someone to join you, FHCA wants to encourage you to make the trip. Each week there are always experienced members in town who are willing to pair up with those new to the process. Plus, FHCA staff wants you to succeed so we’re going to do everything we can to help you prepare. You’ll still have to make the first move, but it’s just a few simple steps.

First, visit the Events tab at FHCA’s website (www.fhca.org) to find the Lobby Days page. Pick a date that works for you and complete the online registration. Teresa Hamlin of our staff will send you a confirmation e-mail that will include information about making your hotel reservations, the anticipated schedule for the day, how to contact your legislator to schedule a meeting and even what to wear. This is always important, as comfortable clothes and shoes that can handle a day of walking and standing certainly add to a better experience.

Once your date is set, contact your Senator’s and Representative’s office and set up an appointment for when you will be in Tallahassee. Remember that legislators are extremely busy, and you may end up meeting with the aide. If that is the case, don’t be disappointed. Legislative aides brief their Senator/Representative on all issues, and a successful meeting with an aide will translate into a good message to the legislator.

In addition to meeting with your Senator and Representative, you should also plan enough time for “drop ins” to any legislator representing your county, as those delegations tend to stick together on many issues.

Upon arrival

FHCA will hold a dinner or breakfast briefing to review the issues and reinforce the message to deliver to legislators. You’ll also receive materials to leave behind and a guide book to find your way around the Capitol. Those materials will focus on our 2014 Legislative Priorities, which can be found in the Advocacy section of our website. You can review those in advance so you can customize the message to fit your personal experiences.

We always recommend no more than four people in a group for legislator meetings. If you’re coming to Lobby Days with your company or district, it’s helpful to identify your small groups ahead of time. It also helps to decide from that group who will open the conversation, discuss each issue and ask for the legislator to commit to an issue or specific bill. If this is your first Lobby Day and you’re on your own, FHCA will pair you with others so you can learn from experience. Be sure to take a picture that you can share with FHCA after the visit.

While you are visiting the Capitol, take time to visit the 22nd floor and see the aerial view of Tallahassee, or tour the historic old Capitol just across the plaza. FHCA will also provide you with a schedule of events for the day, so there may be opportunities to sit in during committee meetings or view one of the chambers in session.

When the day is over, plan enough time to provide FHCA staff with feedback on your appointments. This proves valuable, especially if follow-up questions or discussion with legislators is needed.

Follow up

Once you return home, be sure to send a thank you note to the legislator and include a picture. Invite them to visit your facility and offer yourself as a long term care resource for them in the district.

Now you know what it takes to get involved and make a difference. You can also see for yourself by watching our video on the Lobby Day page of the website. Whatever you do, don’t sit back and let someone else speak on your behalf. Sign up, bring a friend and remember to make it fun!

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