



LEGISLATOR FACILITY TOUR GUIDE

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Advocates for the Long Term Care of Washington's Elderly and Frail



Issuing a Tour Invitation

Get to Know Your Legislators

Start by getting to know your legislators – building personal relationships with legislators is key when trying to influence legislation. A good place to start is a meeting at your legislator's local office. Meetings with legislators are mutually beneficial because:

- You are the expert on long term care issues. Due to their heavy workloads, legislators have to be generalists on a host of issues.
- As a constituent, you have the ultimate influence over a legislator-you vote!
- Legislators seriously weigh how every issue "plays back at home." You provide them with a feel for that, as both a constituent and long term care provider.

When developing this relationship, it is important to meet with the legislator as soon as possible. Campaigns are a great time to get to know your legislators - legislators never forget the people that helped them in their campaigns. Additionally, regardless of whether the legislator is in session or not, stay in contact after the initial meeting so when issues arise, the legislator will look to you as a resource on long term care issues.

Meeting with a Legislator

- To schedule a meeting, call your legislator's office. When scheduling, you should suggest numerous dates, giving yourself a better opportunity to meet.
- Know the issues. Contact the WHCA office if you need help in framing the issues.
- Call closer to the date of the meeting and reconfirm the appointment. If possible, try to find out how long you will be able to spend with the legislator and prepare accordingly.
- Have one or two discussion topics planned and stick to them. A legislator's time is valuable so be brief and to the point.
- Always ask the legislator to take a specific action.
- Invite the legislator to visit your facility.
- Let the legislator know that you are an informed, professional resource on long term care issues and are available if they need information.
- Follow-up with a thank you note after every meeting. Be sure to summarize the meeting in your note.

Inviting a Legislator to Your Facility

The best time to invite a legislator to your facility is when legislators are out of session. Election season is also a great time to plan a facility tour.

Candidates welcome the chance to meet with constituents. A tour of a long term care facility can provide them with desirable photos and news coverage.

To schedule a facility tour, begin by calling or visiting your legislator's office and obtaining several possible dates when he or she is available. Follow the call with a formal letter of invitation. Describe the facility, its operation, and the number of employees and residents.

Do not try planning anything staged or elaborate. The tour should include a simple display of the daily work of a long term care facility. Interaction with a wide variety of residents and staff is essential. Plan a meeting with the legislator, facility administrator and director of nursing. A key part of the facility tour is planning a one-on-one discussion with the legislator to discuss important long term care issues. Lastly, be sure to prepare a printed fact sheet about your facility and be prepared to answer questions from the legislator and his/her staff members.

Planning a Tour

Once you have had your personal meeting with your legislator and extended an invitation for a tour of your facility, it is time to start planning your tour. A well-planned tour leaves a legislator with a better understanding of your facility and can make an impact on how he/she sees long term care issues. A well-publicized tour can also enhance your visibility to the community.

Although you don't have to, it may be a good idea to tie your tour to a special event. All of the following special events are potential opportunities for legislators to share the public spotlight at the time they visit your facility:

- Groundbreaking for new or expanded facilities
- Scholarship presentations
- Professional award ceremonies
- Employee of the Year Award
- Launching of local civic or health care initiative
- Facility open house
- 100 year old birthday celebration
- Inauguration of new services for residents or community

Planning Your Tour: Step by Step

1. If more than one public official is invited for the same tour, be sure each one knows in advance that the others will be included. Unless it is a major event, plan to invite one elected official at a time.
2. Set aside at least two hours for the tour. Breakfast, lunch, or a reception should be included. Notify employees about the tour and provide them with background information on the visitors. You can request campaign pamphlets from the visiting candidates. They will appreciate that their message is being delivered.
3. Include residents and their families in the process so they know you are actively involved on their behalf.
4. Prior to the event, consider sending a press advisory to local media announcing the tour. Coordinate with the legislator's aide who will notify the media of dates and times. If the facility administrator handles this, send information to *city desks* at newspapers and *assignment editors* for local television and radio.
5. Arrange for a good photographer to be on hand to take a selection of quality, non-intrusive photos of the event. Every elected official likes to have photos of meetings with constituent groups.
6. Make it possible for employees, residents, and family members to meet the elected officials or candidates. Schedule the visit so that the elected official or candidate will have time to make brief remarks to assembled employees.
7. Arrange for some time when you and your senior staff can sit down with the legislator in your office to discuss long term care issues.
8. Plan for the overall tour to be conducted by the administrator. Assign specific supervisors to explain the operation of their work areas. Prepare them so they are comfortable and not surprised by the visitors.
9. After the tour, ALWAYS send a thank-you letter to the officials who made the visit. It is a nice touch to include copies of photographs or news articles related to the tour.

Prepare a Facility Profile

You should prepare a profile of your facility that shows:

- Number of residents and services provided
- Number of employees
- Dollars paid in federal, state, and local taxes by your facility
- Dollars paid in property taxes
- Number of vendors who support your facility (highlight local vendors)
- Unique services that you are providing to your employees, residents, or the community (i.e., health seminars)
- List of community service programs sponsored by your facility or your employees

Be natural. Do not lobby them too much with political issues at this time. By allowing your legislators to see the daily operations of your facility, they will never look at long term care issues the same again.

Conducting a Tour

Getting your Message Across

1. Always manage the actual tour yourself.
2. Before or after the meeting, show the legislator some of the realities of resident care and compliance with changing standards. Emphasize quality resident care during the tour and throughout the visit.
3. Show the legislator any area of the facility that has been subject to changing compliance standards or interpretations. Discuss the costs of achieving compliance.
4. Point out the amount of paperwork that is required for compliance and the time and personnel that are needed to complete the paperwork.
5. If there is a regulation that poses particular difficulties in application to your facility – for example, storage of linen carts or cross contamination – point out to the legislator some of the "real life roadblocks" to compliance.
6. Point out as many types of patients as possible and discuss the range of care provided and varied cost of care. This will help to give a realistic and well-rounded picture to the lawmaker.

Communicating With Your Legislator

It is important that you include not only yourself but also other members of the staff in your meetings and tour with the legislator. While you are speaking with the legislator, ask "open ended" questions in order to elicit lengthier, thoughtful responses, for example:

- *"From your legislative perspective, what do you see as the key issues affecting long term care in Washington today?"*
- *"How do you think we should address the rising costs of long term health care in the years to come?"*
- *"Do you see the need for more community involvement in the legislative process? If so, what can we do together to help encourage more involvement?"*

Additionally, it is best to stick to the facts. Don't give way to emotional arguments or unsubstantiated opinions and never stretch the truth. Also, be a good listener, even if the legislator disagrees with aspects of our position. Acknowledge where other views have merit, and stress that you want to work more closely whenever possible. Always try to end on a positive note and leave the meeting open-ended for further discussions.

Make sure to follow up promptly by sending a thank you letter, as well as pictures and press clippings. A sample thank you note is provided on page 9.

Follow-Up after the Tour

An essential part of a successful political life is a prompt follow-up. Your follow-up should be immediate, courteous, and memorable:

- Send a "thank you letter" the day after the facility tour, while the details of the tour are fresh in the legislator's mind. Send the letter to the Washington office of the national legislator, or to the office of a state legislator in the state capital. Also send a letter to any legislative staffer who helped make the visit possible.
- To make your follow up memorable, add a personal note from the tour, such as a subject you discussed one-on-one with the legislator or a commitment they made to you about their continuing support of long term care issues.
- Send copies of the photographs taken during the tour, while they were meeting your residents and staff. Also, send any newspaper clippings about the event from the local press. Legislators appreciate visual materials because they can be used during campaign time, which can further strengthen your personal connection.
- If the local press did not cover the event, send the editor a brief write up and any good photos of the public official.
- Communicate with your state association and AHCA's Washington staff if your tour included a national legislator. Send WHCA staff a summary of the tour,

photos, press clippings, and any significant comments made by the legislator about long term care issues.

WHCA is Ready to Assist You

The WHCA team in Olympia is certainly the single most valuable tool you have to get involved in the political process. They know how to get a legislator's attention – and cooperation. They know the ins and outs of Capital Hill activities, committees, subcommittees, legislative process, and staff contacts.

WHCA staff is here to help you. Don't hesitate to call 1-800-562-6170. In return, please keep WHCA informed about your planned activities in advance, and your successes once they are accomplished. Everything you tell us personally and through press clippings and photos adds to our fund of information we can use to support our legislative efforts. Start by filling out the [attached form](#).

With the proper planning, agenda, and follow-up, conducting facility tours for national and state legislators can become an easy and enjoyable part of your grassroots political activism. It helps your particular facility while supporting your entire industry, and WHCA thanks you for your involvement.

Legislator Facility Tour Report to WHCA

Name of Facility:

Administrator:

Address:

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Phone:

Fax:

Date of Facility Tour:

Participating Legislator:

Topics Discussed (be sure to include any significant comments/feedback from the legislator):

Did any press attend? If so, who were they (paper, TV station) and did they cover the event?

Were any photos taken? If so, can we get some copies?

General thoughts/observations about your tour:

Return via fax to 360/754-2412

Sample Facility Tour "Thank You Note"

FACILITY LETTERHEAD

JOHNSVILLE LONG TERM CARE FACILITY
1234 Main Street
Johnsville, WA 98332

January 5, 2005

The Honorable Samuel Jones
Washington State House of Representatives
Olympia, WA

Dear Representative Jones,

On behalf of the residents and staff of the Johnsville facility, I want to thank you for making time in your very busy schedule to visit with us on January 2nd. Everyone here greatly enjoyed meeting you and each of us was gratified by your obvious commitment to issues affecting the quality and future of long term care in our community, state, and nation.

Your comments on private long term care insurance made a particularly lasting impression on me, and I'm sure, on our staff. It is reassuring for those of us committed to helping to meet the daily long term care needs of the elderly and disabled citizens of our community that elected officials such as you share our commitment.

I know that your most valuable commodity is time, and we all appreciate that you have shared some of it with us. I look forward to speaking with you again soon. If I can be of any assistance, in particular when technically complex issues involving long term care are before you, please call on me any time.

Sincerely yours,

Roberta Johnson
Administrator

P.S.: Enclosed are some of the best photos we took during your tour of the Johnsville facility, as well as some press clippings about the event. I hope these will be of use to your staff for publicity purposes in the future.

SAMPLE PRESS ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

Contact: John Doe, Senior Administrator, Quality Long Term Care Facility, (123) 555-4850

What: Quality Facility will host a facility tour for Senator Bill Jones to demonstrate the commitment to quality care for the elderly and disabled in our community, and how this reflects on national news affecting long term care and the resources needed to meet this commitment.

Where: Name of Facility
Address

When: Date of Event
Time

Who: Name of the legislator and any other VIPs who will accompany him or her, as well as senior administrators in the facility who will participate.

Agenda: Briefly describe the tour schedule (e.g.: viewing daily operations, meeting residents, lunch, brief remarks to assembled employees).