

# Advocacy 101: Preparing for Hill Day 2016

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By AHIMA's Advocacy and Public Policy Team

Do you consider yourself an HIM advocate? Are you passionate about HIM initiatives? Do you want to make a difference in the strategic direction of the HIM profession?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you should plan to participate in AHIMA's 2016 Leadership and Advocacy Symposium on April 4, 2016 and Capitol Hill Day on April 5, 2016 in Washington, DC. The symposium is a one-day collaborative educational conference for AHIMA's volunteer leadership, while Hill Day provides AHIMA members with the opportunity to interact with their congressional members and advocate for issues that are important to health information management (HIM) professionals.

Both events provide tremendous networking opportunities and build name recognition for AHIMA and the profession. Attendees often state that they walk away feeling as though they have gained invaluable experience and truly made a difference in the profession. Those participating in Hill Day 2016 will find it advantageous to spend some time reviewing the legislative process and become familiarized with individuals who work on Capitol Hill. This column provides an overview of advocacy basics to serve as a foundation for those who wish to participate more formally in HIM advocacy work.

## Who Works on Capitol Hill?

In addition to 435 US Representatives and 100 US Senators, the following two types of legislative staff members work on Capitol Hill:

- **Personal office staff members**—Most of these individuals work as legislative assistants to members of Congress.
- **Committee staff**—These individuals have years of experience in their field and are selected by either the Chair or Ranking Member of a committee. The Ranking Member is the most senior (though not necessarily the longest-serving) member of the minority party on a committee (or subcommittee).

## How Does a Bill Become a Law?

Consider the following steps:

1. **The bill is introduced.** This introduction is initiated by members of either the Senate or House of Representatives. These members may or may not circulate the bill among colleagues to ask for co-sponsorship. In the House, the bill is officially submitted by being inserted into a hopper (a wooden box on the House floor). In the Senate, the bill is submitted to clerks on the Senate floor. Upon introduction, the bill receives a number as well as a designation based on the chamber of introduction.
2. **The bill goes to committee.** The Speaker of the House refers the bill to all committees that have jurisdiction over provisions in the bill. In the Senate, bills are typically referred to a committee using a similar process. Each committee subsequently reviews the bill. This typically includes holding a hearing and completing a committee markup. If the committee members want more information before deciding whether to send the bill to the House or Senate floor, the bill is sent to a subcommittee. While in subcommittee, the bill is closely examined, and expert opinions are gathered before it is sent back to the committee for approval.
3. **The bill is reported.** Once each committee approves the bill, it's reported to the floor of the chamber of origination—either the House or Senate.
4. **The bill is debated.** Once debated, members vote on the bill. If the majority of members pass the bill, it's then referred to the opposite chamber where it goes through many of the same steps.

5. **The bill is sent to the President.** Once the bill has passed both the House and Senate, it goes to the President who can sign and pass the bill (making it law), veto the bill, or do nothing (i.e., pocket veto). In the event of a veto, the House and Senate can vote a second time. If two-thirds of members of Congress support the bill, the President's veto is overridden, and the bill becomes a law. If the President takes no action—and Congress is still in session—the bill automatically becomes law after 10 days.

## Which Committees Have Primary Jurisdiction Over Healthcare Issues?

In the House of Representatives, the following committees (and subcommittees) oversee healthcare issues:

- **Ways and Means Committee**
  - The Health Subcommittee of the Ways and Means Committee oversees revenue-related aspects of the Social Security system, Medicare, and social services programs.
- **Energy and Commerce Committee**
  - The Health Subcommittee of this committee oversees public health and quarantine; hospital construction; mental health; biomedical research and development; health information technology, privacy and cybersecurity; public health insurance (Medicare and Medicaid) and private health insurance; medical malpractice and medical malpractice insurance; the regulation of food, drugs, and cosmetics; drug abuse; the Department of Health and Human Services; the National Institutes of Health; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Indian Health Service; and all aspects of the above-referenced jurisdiction related to the Department of Homeland Security.

In the Senate, the following committees oversee healthcare issues:

- **Finance Committee**
  - The Health Care Subcommittee of the Finance Committee oversees health programs under the Social Security Act, including Medicare and Medicaid; the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP); Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF); other health and human services programs financed by a specific tax or trust fund; and national Social Security.
- **Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP)**
  - The Primary Health and Retirement Security Subcommittee of this committee oversees a wide range of issues, including: Health Resources and Services Act; substance abuse and mental health; oral health; healthcare disparities; railroad retirement; private retirement plans and the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation through the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA); and the domestic activities of the Red Cross.

To learn more about the structure, jurisdiction, and recent activities for each of these committees, visit [www.congress.gov/committees](http://www.congress.gov/committees). On Hill Day, you'll meet with members of Congress who represent the congressional district in which you live or work. You may also meet with personal office staff members or committee members.

## What Can I Do to Prepare?

To prepare for Hill Day, get to know your members of Congress. On which committees does he or she serve? What are his or her legislative priorities? Find out. Also consider creating a personalized packet that includes the following information:

- Overview of AHIMA and its mission
- Explanation of the role of HIM professionals
- Background about your component state association (i.e., number of members, type of work performed)
- Number and types of HIM educational programs in your state
- Contact information for AHIMA's Board of Directors
- Summary of what you do and where you work

- Summary of the most important issues facing HIM today, including the issues that are most pressing to you and your employer

## What Insights Can Previous Hill Day Participants Share?

Anita Doupnik, RHIA, senior manager of HIM professional services at Nuance Communications, attended her first Hill Day in 2006 and says she has been hooked on the advocacy experience ever since. “The networking opportunities are invaluable both personally and professionally, although even more importantly, there is the opportunity to possibly push a bill forward or stop a bill from being enacted,” she says.

Sheila N. Bowlds, MBA, RHIA, system director of MISD and coding at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, MI, says she enjoys educating legislators during Hill Day. “Discovering the level of understanding that legislators do (or do not) have regarding these issues is very interesting. Providing education where needed... can be an enlightening experience,” she says.

When asked why advocacy is so important, Theresa D. Jones, MHA, RHIA, FAHIMA, healthcare director of clinical information services and HIM at Abington Jefferson Health in Abington, PA, says “to secure the future of my profession.” “The continued growth and development of the profession requires strong advocates who pave the way for new ideas and ensures that the HIM profession continues to be a prominent and well-known entity in Washington,” Jones says.

AHIMA members who return to Hill Day year after year get to know their members of Congress, Jones says. “He or she will remember your name and will be willing to engage with you on issues that are important to the profession,” she says.

See you in Washington, DC in April 2016!

The AHIMA Advocacy and Public Policy Team ([advocacyandpolicy@ahima.org](mailto:advocacyandpolicy@ahima.org)) is based in Washington, DC.

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