

# Give a Hoot. Join the Boot

Contributing Author: Jan Lanier JD, RN, Interim chair, Public Policy Committee



Beginning in late January 2025 when the results of the 2024 election are known and a new session of Ohio's General Assembly is getting underway, a select number of nurses in Ohio will have an opportunity to participate in a policy bootcamp to maintain pathways of public policy advocacy conceived and supported by the Public Policy Committee (PPC). The bootcamp will prepare participants not only to advocate for, but also to influence/shape policy decisions. The bootcamp will consist of both didactic and clinical components and span a total of 10 weeks. Four of those weeks—the clinical aspect, which is unique to this bootcamp, will include guided structured trips to the statehouse in Columbus that will enable participants to interact with legislators and see first-hand policymakers at work. ANA-Ohio public policy experts will share their knowledge and insights both in a virtual classroom and on site at the statehouse to demystify the process. Participants will be expected to apply the information and become more involved in the Ohio legislative arena.

Be part of something new and exciting. Bootcamp capacity is limited so visit <https://www.ana-ohio.org> events to learn more and register to become a "boot on the ground" in '25.

## Why should a nurse attend this bootcamp?

The answer to that question is related to another question many nurses face. Why did you want to be a nurse? When nurses are asked that question, many will say, "I want to help people. I want to make a difference." Helping comes in many shapes and sizes. Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, you feel like you are falling short of that lofty goal. That feeling of ineffectiveness can make one pessimistic, skeptical and wary. At times, however, the reason nurses are unable to fulfill their practice goals in the workplace is due to policy decisions made or not made by elected officials.

Although nurses are aware of the importance of patient advocacy, many of them turn a deaf ear when it comes to policy advocacy. "I didn't go into nursing to deal with political matters. I simply want to take care of my patients."

It is not surprising that nurses have that response. They are not typically exposed to or made aware of the role public policy (laws and regulations made or authorized by elected officials) play in their professional lives. Policy is deeply intertwined within every aspect of health care—who we care for, where we work, who pays for what, the drugs that are allowed and those that are not, and much more. Yet, few prelicensure nursing education programs address the intersection between nursing practice and public policy. Graduate programs may require a policy course, but many students give it only cursory attention.

While nursing has typically used the term "advocacy" to describe a nurse's role and expectations with respect to policy making, that term may no longer resonate or accurately reflect what is really

needed if nurses are to have a relevant impact on the world of public policy. According to the PEW Research Center, younger Americans, the Gen Z folks (people born between 1997-2012—ages 7-22—the next generation of nurses) are into "influencing." One in four of these individuals now wants to become an influencer rather than a fireman or astronaut, or nurse (Suciu, 2022). While older Americans do not believe influencer is a real job, many members of generation-Z have found that their endorsements carry weight and can be lucrative financially.

Taking a lesson from a younger generation and looking ahead, advocacy, in the context of policy making, may be a "tired" word and a tired concept. It sounds passive especially in an era when activism is on the rise. Simply put, advocacy may not be enough. People want results. Terminology matters because it sets a framework for outcomes and objectives. While Gen-Zers' concept of "influencing" may differ from that of older generations, making a difference remains a shared vision. Strategic advocacy coupled with supported expertise could encourage many Ohio nurses to add "influencer" to their resumes and job descriptions.

There are over 200,000 registered nurses in Ohio. Imagine, if their voices came together, what an impact they could have. The nursing profession has often been characterized as a "sleeping giant." Efforts to awaken that giant have met with mixed success and little constancy over the years. Perhaps we need to consider flipping the script—doing things differently. ANA-Ohio's PPC is ready to do just that. ■

## References

Suciu, P. (October 20, 2022). Young people want to be influencers even as older Americans say it isn't a real job, *Forbes*.