

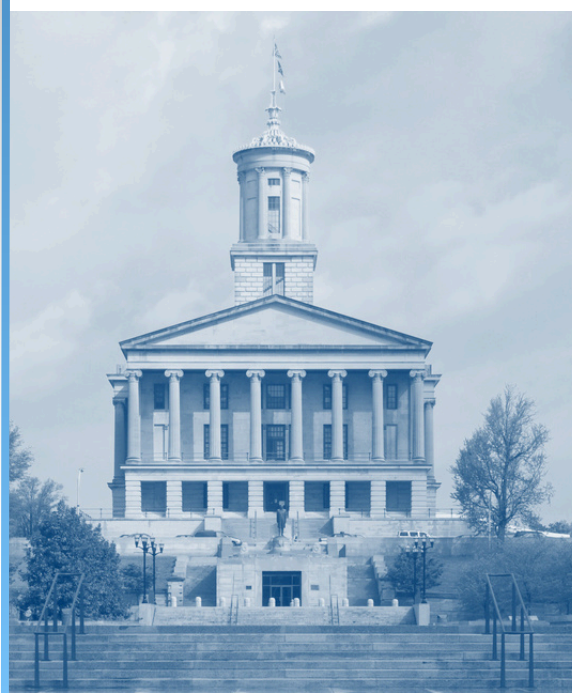
ADVOCACY HANDBOOK 2025



Tennessee
DENTAL ASSOCIATION

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INTRODUCTION

WHY IS ADVOCACY IMPORTANT?

Decisions made by the Tennessee legislature on taxation, regulation, scope of practice, and licensing significantly impact dental practices and patient care. The Tennessee Dental Association is dedicated to advocating for policies and legislation that support dentists and enhance oral health for all.

Tennessee has a citizen legislature, meaning that most of our state legislators have full-time jobs outside of public policy. As a result, they often rely on lobbyists and interest groups to educate them on complex issues. This presents a unique opportunity—and responsibility—for us to ensure that the perspectives and concerns of the dental community are well-represented.

Through grassroots efforts, we empower TDA members to engage with policymakers, contribute to the legislative process, and advocate for policies that benefit both dental professionals and the patients they serve.

As you navigate this handbook, you will find tools, resources, and strategies designed to enhance your advocacy efforts. Whether you are a seasoned advocate or new to the legislative process, this guide will equip you with the knowledge and confidence to effectively champion the issues that matter most to dentists and patients in Tennessee.

ACCESS ADVOCACY RESOURCES

Get easy access to the resources you need to stay informed and take action. Visit the **Advocacy** section of the TDA website to learn more.

[LEARN MORE](#)



THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

The **Tennessee General Assembly** is a part-time, bicameral legislature consisting of a Senate and a House of Representatives.

The **Senate** is comprised of 33 members who serve in four-year, staggered terms.

The **House of Representatives** is comprised of 99 members who are elected to serve two-year terms.

The constitutional authority of the General Assembly is to enact, amend, and repeal laws of the state of Tennessee. Legislative sessions begin each January and usually end by May.

The powers granted to the body by the State Constitution include the appropriation of all money by the state treasury; the levy and collection of taxes; and the right to authorize counties and incorporated towns to levy taxes.



TYPES OF BILLS

Administration Bill: A bill introduced at the request of the Governor.

Appropriations Bill: The bill which appropriates the state's operating budget from the state treasury.

Caption Bill: A placeholder bill which opens up part of the Tennessee Code Annotated but does not indicate legislative intent.

Constitutional Amendment: A resolution that amends the state constitution. Proposed constitutional amendments must pass three consecutive sessions by two-thirds majority before being placed on the ballot for a vote by the public.

General Bill: Any other piece of legislation filed by members of the Tennessee General Assembly.





HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

INTRODUCTION

A legislator introduces a bill in the body of which he or she is a member by filing it with the appropriate clerk. The bills are jacketed and contain the signature(s) of the sponsor as well as the caption of the bill.

NUMBERED BY CHIEF CLERK

The bill is then examined by the chief clerk of the House or Senate to see that it conforms to legislative rules, is given a number which is placed on all copies, and is then distributed as required under the rules.

PASSED ON FIRST AND SECOND CONSIDERATION

The Tennessee Constitution provides that no bill shall become a law until it has been considered and passed on three different days in each house. This step is largely procedural.

REFERRED TO STANDING COMMITTEE

The Speaker of each chamber refers the bill to the appropriate standing committee under the proper order of business. The bill will remain on the committee calendar until it is voted upon, taken off notice, or referred back to the clerk's desk from inaction.

REFERRED TO CALENDAR

The calendar committees set the calendar and establish the schedule of meetings of the various standing committees. While the Senate Calendar Committee determines **when** a bill reaches the floor for debate, the House Calendar and Rules Committee determines **whether** a bill reaches the floor.

PLACED ON CALENDAR

Written calendars are required to be posted in the Senate chamber at least 24 hours prior to consideration and in the House chamber at least 48 hours prior to consideration.

PASSED ON THIRD CONSIDERATION

The bill is taken up for passage and is open to debate by the legislative body. After being considered the third time, it may be passed with or without amendment by a constitutional majority.



HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

BILL IS ENGROSSED

Having been passed in one body, the bill then goes to the office of the chief engrossing clerk, where it is retyped, without errors or erasures, and is transmitted to the other body.

COMPANION BILLS

When a bill is passed in one chamber, it then goes to the other to await action on its companion. Bills must be substituted and conformed into one identical version before becoming law.

BILL IS ENROLLED

After being passed by both chambers, the bill is enrolled, then retyped, without errors or erasures, on a heavy-weight paper by the chief engrossing clerk in the house of origin. This step involves preparing the bill in the exact form passed by both chambers and in a format suitable for approval by the two speakers and the governor.

SIGNED BY SPEAKERS

After the speakers sign the enrolled copy, it is automatically transmitted to the Governor for action.

SIGNED BY GOVERNOR

The Governor may sign the bill; veto it; or allow it to become law without signature. The Governor is allowed 10 days (except Sundays) after a bill is presented to approve or veto the bill; if there is no action within that period, the bill becomes law without signature.

ASSIGNED PUBLIC CHAPTER NUMBER

The Secretary of State's office assigns each general bill passed into law a public chapter number, while local bills are assigned private chapter numbers. The public chapters are published in pamphlet form soon thereafter for distribution to members of the General Assembly and other interested parties.

INCORPORATED INTO THE CODE

The Tennessee Code Commission and the publishers of the Tennessee Code Annotated convert and annotate new laws into the existing code. The supplements and replacement volumes of the code are usually available about six months after the General Assembly adjourns.

GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

Grassroots advocacy harnesses the ideas, relationships, and actions of individuals to drive change in public policy.

Simply put, grassroots advocacy empowers the average person to make a significant impact on policy issues. It often begins with identifying a specific issue or cause and mobilizing support around it. This process allows everyday stakeholders to actively participate and make their voices heard in the policy-making arena.

For organizations like the Tennessee Dental Association, utilizing grassroots advocacy has proven to be a powerful tool. It harnesses the ideas, relationships, and actions of TDA members to drive change in public policy. Unlike direct lobbying, which involves professional lobbyists targeting decision-makers for specific policy votes, grassroots advocacy relies on volunteers like you to educate legislators and other officials on how legislation and regulations impact the dental profession and the public. Your involvement provides necessary context for policymakers to understand the real-world implications of their decisions.

The strength of grassroots advocacy lies in the collective efforts of many individuals. Whether it's advocating for dental insurance reform, providing education on the importance of community water fluoridation, improving the TennCare program, or addressing dental workforce issues, TDA's dedicated grassroots advocates make their voices heard at local, state, and federal levels.

This means **YOU** are the most powerful advocate in advancing the cause of dentists and patients in Tennessee. You don't have to be a political expert to make a difference. You only need the desire to make an impact.

As dedicated dental professionals, you know how to best advocate for your field. By sharing your experiences and insights on critical dental health policies, you provide legislators with the information they need to develop effective legislation and regulations that support the dental profession.



TDA ADVOCACY ACTION CENTER

We are dedicated to keeping our members informed and engaged with the state public policy issues that impact the dental profession. The [TDA Advocacy Action Center](#), powered by Voter Voice, is a simple and effective tool that enables you to connect with your state legislators. This platform allows you to take meaningful action on key issues, helping to shape policies that affect your practice, your patients, and the future of dentistry in Tennessee.

Taking action is easy—simply enter your home address and you'll be instantly connected to lawmakers representing your district. Your participation can have a significant impact on policies that influence our profession and the care we provide to our patients.

When timely action is needed, we launch targeted campaigns to ensure Tennessee dentists are represented during key decision-making moments. You'll receive Advocacy Action Alerts directly in your inbox, but we recommend signing up for text alerts as well. We'll only send texts during critical times, ensuring you're notified when your response is most impactful. Text **TNDENTAL** to **50457** to sign up.

**TEXT TNDENTAL
TO 50457**

**ADD YOUR VOICE TO
THE CONVERSATION**

SIGN UP

TENNESSEE DENTISTS' DAY ON THE HILL

After a long hiatus, the TDA has proudly resumed the Tennessee Dentists' Day on the Hill. During the Tennessee General Assembly's legislative session, TDA Legislative Contact Dentists gather at the State Capitol to engage with lawmakers. The primary goals are to solidify legislative support and educate policymakers on pressing issues impacting dentistry in Tennessee.

This event highlights the dedication of TDA members, staff, and lobbyists to advancing the interests of both dentists and patients. It serves as a platform for Tennessee dentists to interact with policymakers, share insights on critical issues, and influence policies affecting the dental field and patient well-being.

SERVE AS A LEGISLATIVE CONTACT DENTIST

Join a statewide network of colleagues working to strengthen the dental profession's representation in Tennessee's political process. As a Legislative Contact Dentist, you'll have the opportunity to influence key policies, engage in the legislative process, and help protect the interests of dentists and patients in Tennessee. Click the button below to get started.

[SIGN UP](#)



HIGH-IMPACT ADVOCACY

Cultivating lasting relationships with lawmakers strengthens the impact of our advocacy efforts.

10 TIPS FOR HIGH-IMPACT ADVOCACY

1. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Who are your elected officials? Are they a Republican or Democrat? Conservative, moderate or liberal? On which committees do they serve? Which issues matter most to them? Know if they will be a key vote on an issue.

2. MAKE INITIAL CONTACT

Initiate a relationship with your legislator by writing a letter or making a phone call. Politely explain your concerns and ask for your representative's position on the issue.

3. PRESENT ONE ISSUE AT A TIME

You should not air a list of grievances or raise multiple concerns in a single interaction. Pick the issue that is most critical to you and explore it in depth. You can always approach a different issue at a later time.

4. USE PERSONAL ANECDOTES

Personal stories are the most powerful and effective method of swaying a legislator. They are the best way to explain how an abstract health care policy affects their constituents at home.

5. OFFER SOLUTIONS

You should not just talk about how bad a problem is. Offer up reasonable solutions and provide your legislator with a course of action. Actions can include sponsoring legislation or voting on a bill.





6. KNOW YOUR ISSUE

Present your position, then back it up with facts and background information, including statistics, studies, and personal anecdotes that support your point of view. Know your opposition's talking points and be prepared to discuss them.

7. CULTIVATE A RELATIONSHIP

Quality relationships stem from repeated contact during the legislative session and during the legislative recess. Build your credibility as a trusted resource by making yourself available for meetings in the district.

8. UNDERSTAND TIMING

Even the most eloquently written letter or email has no effect if it comes after a key vote. Knowing when to engage your legislator is a critical factor to your success.

9. ENGAGE LOCALLY

Start building a relationship with your legislator before the legislative session begins. This is a fundamental step to building the long-term trust needed to ask for a vote on a specific issue.

10. FOLLOW UP

Legislators appreciate constituents who follow up. It shows you are passionate about the issue. Be polite, but persistent. Ask for an update on where the member stands on an issue.

PERSONAL VISITS

The personal visit is the single most effective advocacy technique. A trip to the Capitol represents your effort and dedication to a specific cause. Your representative will be impressed and will make time to meet with you.

MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

The legislative environment is chaotic, so it is important to have realistic expectations when visiting lawmakers. During session, 15 minutes is a typical time frame for your meeting. Use your time wisely by communicating your point succinctly and offering reasonable solutions to the problem.

SCHEDULING A MEETING

In the fast-paced setting of the Capitol, it is imperative to use telephone and email skillfully to navigate legislative offices and staff. Understand that staff are the gatekeepers to the legislator, so always treat them with the same respect and dignity you would the elected official.

Start by calling their office. If you do not get an answer, follow up with an email. **Identify yourself as a constituent and a dentist**, the nature of your inquiry, and supply a couple of options for date and time. If meeting in Nashville during session, Mondays and Fridays are not typically options unless the legislator lives locally. If your interest is in a specific bill, it is always helpful to include the bill number in the subject line of an email.

BEFORE THE MEETING

Do some research on your legislator. The Tennessee General Assembly's website will list his or her hometown, party affiliation, committee assignments, and community involvement. Identifying which issues are important to the legislator beforehand will give you more credibility and influence. It is also important to know the committees on which your legislator serves. Members of the legislature have more influence over legislation assigned to their respective committees and tend to focus their efforts on that subject matter.

DURING THE MEETING

Use talking points and handouts to make your points clearly and concisely. Explain why the issue is important to you personally or how it affects your patients. If there are two or more people in the room, identify a spokesperson to lead the meeting and ask other members to speak as discussion moves along. Listen to the legislators' questions and concerns, and respond as well as you are able. If you are unsure of an answer it is perfectly appropriate to follow up with information after the meeting. Keep things conversational and avoid party politics.

AFTER THE MEETING

Make sure to follow up with promised information or answers to questions during the meeting. Write a brief thank you note to your legislator. Email is acceptable.



LOBBYING DO'S AND DON'TS

Lobbying is simply having conversations and advocating for specific outcomes. Instead of overthinking this list, focus on participating in the meeting, finding common ground, and establishing meaningful connections.

DO

- Identify yourself and your district.
- Thank your legislator for meeting with you. Use correct forms of address (e.g. Senator, Representative, Chairman).
- Be professional, courteous, direct, concise, factual and specific.
- Know your audience.
- Offer your expertise.
- Illustrate how your proposed solution will help their district.
- Be specific about the action you want the legislator to take.
- Be reasonable.
- Respect the position of the legislator and accept that they may not agree with you.
- Always follow up with information you have promised.
- After a visit or call with your legislator, follow up with a letter or email thanking them for the time and summarizing any commitments they made during the meeting.

DON'T

- Link campaign contributions to legislative support.
- Guess or give inaccurate information.
- Be argumentative or abrasive.
- Threaten or be rude to a legislator or their staff.
- Make moral judgments based on a vote or an issue.
- Hold grudges or burn bridges. You never know when you will need a legislator for a future vote.
- Publicly or privately complain about a legislator.
- Ignore a legislator, then contact a legislator from another district for help with your issue.
- Interrupt a legislator or staff member while they are obviously busy.
- Cover more than one subject at a time.
- Press for an answer on your first visit.
- Give up! We will not win on every issue.



Tennessee Dental PAC is the non-partisan political action committee of the Tennessee Dental Association, providing financial support to candidates for statewide office who understand the importance of dentistry and its role in overall health. Each year, Tennessee Dental PAC contributes thousands of dollars to ensure our concerns are heard. Joining the Capitol Club is a proactive way to influence legislative and regulatory decisions that affect you, your patients, and your practice.



DENTAL PAC CONTRIBUTOR	SILVER SUSTAINING MEMBER	GOLD ADVOCATE	CAPITOL CLUB PLATINUM LEADER
LESS THAN \$150	\$150-\$299	\$300-\$549	\$550+
<p>Recognition in <i>TDA news</i> (Jan-Feb)</p> <hr/> <p>Recognition on signage at annual Music City Dental Conference</p>	<p>All Contributor-level incentives</p> <hr/> <p>Priority access to advocacy resources</p> <hr/> <p>Personalized thank-you letter</p>	<p>All Silver-level incentives</p> <hr/> <p>Personalized Capitol Club certificate</p> <hr/> <p>Invitation to legislative update with TDA leaders and lobbyists</p>	<p>All Gold-level incentives</p> <hr/> <p>Collectible Capitol Club enamel pin</p> <hr/> <p>Priority access to limited attendance events, including Tennessee Dentists' Day on the Hill</p>

DONATE

LEGISLATIVE GLOSSARY

Act: A statute (law) enacted by the legislature and signed by the governor or becomes law without a signature after 10 days.

Adopt: To approve an action (i.e., an amendment, committee report, motion).

Adjourn: To conclude session for that day, with the hour and day of the next meeting set prior.

Amend: To make a change in a bill or a law.

Appropriation: A bill which appropriates money from the state treasury during a fiscal year to implement the state operating budget. Money may provide for other items of expenditure, such as local projects, through amendments.

Assigned: All bills must be heard and approved on three separate readings by each house. The first two readings are pro forma. Following the third reading, the speaker designates the appropriate standing committee to hear and discuss the merits of the bill.

Bicameral: A legislative body with two chambers.

Bill: A proposed law presented for approval to a legislative body.

Bill Number: The number the Senate or House chief clerk assigns to a bill at the time of introduction. All bills must have a companion filed in the alternate chamber.

Blue Book: An annual publication featuring governmental information and facts about Tennessee produced by the Secretary of State. Traditionally designed with a blue binding.

Budget: The recommended allocation of state revenues presented by the governor to the General Assembly in the form of a document for its consideration during the legislative session. It is filed with the chief clerks in the form of a bill and known as the Appropriations Bill.

Caption: A brief description of a bill's contents appearing on a bill and the bill's jacket. A bill's content cannot be any broader than its caption. Each caption will "open" one or more titles of Tennessee Code Annotated.

Caucus: A group of legislators with common cause.

Committee: A group of legislators of one or both chambers which conduct studies or make recommendations on a piece of legislation to the Senate or House.

Conference: A committee comprised of members of both chambers appointed by the speakers to reconcile differences in a piece of legislation.

Companion Bill: Identical copies of a bill introduced in both the Senate and House.

Concurrence: One chamber approves an action taken by another chamber.

Consent Calendar: A bill calendar used to group noncontroversial bills together to allow approval in one motion.

Constitutional Majority: A constitutional majority in the Senate is 17 votes; in the House, 50 votes. Any bill must receive constitutional majority before it is considered passed by the respective chamber.

LEGISLATIVE GLOSSARY

Deferred: Postponement of a bill that has been placed on calendar for some definitive length of time, normally in weeks. Sometimes referred to as “rolling” a bill.

Enacted: A bill becomes law and takes effect.

Executive Order: A written document issued by the governor to effectuate a purpose over which he has authority.

Extraordinary Session: A session of the legislature held in the interim between regular sessions, called for a specific number of days by the governor or upon petition of two-thirds of the members elected to each house. It is restricted to matters specifically enumerated in the call. Frequently referred to as a special session.

File: Legislation filed with the respective clerk to be printed and assigned a unique number.

Fiscal Note: An analysis prepared by the Joint Fiscal Review Committee of a bill, resolution, or amendment to indicate its fiscal effect or estimated dollar implications as to cost or revenue. All fiscal notes project cost for two fiscal years.

Fiscal Year: The 12-month period for which appropriations, budgets, and financial reports are made running from July 1 to June 30.

General Sub: A Senate term that refers to the bill being taken off notice.

Heel: A motion in which a bill is moved to the end of the calendar in either a committee or on the floor. Typically referred to as “moving to the heel.”

House: Comprised of 99 members representing districts of roughly 65,000 Tennesseans each. Elected for two-year terms in even-numbered years only.

Joint Resolution: A resolution both chambers pass making a statement on a public issue, requesting action from a government office, or establishing a task force. After passage, the joint resolution is signed by both speakers and the governor.

Laid Over: Floor action on a bill is postponed for one legislative day.

Legislative Intent: The purpose for which a measure is introduced or passed. This becomes critically important if and when there is disagreement over the legislation as enacted.

Motion: To propose an action. A bill must be motioned and seconded by committee members before it can be considered and voted upon.

Off Notice: A term that signifies a bill will not be heard in committee or placed on a calendar in the near future.

Public Chapter: The number assigned to a bill by the secretary of state before it is codified in statute.

Quorum: The minimum number of members of a chamber (or committee) required to conduct business.

Recess: A temporary termination of a meeting.

Regular Calendar: Lists of bills required to be posted in each chamber prior to consideration. Each committee also establishes regular calendars. No legislation can be considered unless the bill is placed on calendar before the committee meeting.

LEGISLATIVE GLOSSARY

Regular Session: The 90-day session held over a two-year general assembly. The body convenes on the second Tuesday of January in an odd-numbered year.

Roll Call: Names of members present in the chamber or committee are recorded to establish a quorum or take a vote.

Rules: A set of guidelines approved at the beginning of each two-year session for conducting orderly business. Each chamber establishes its own rules.

Senate: Comprised of 33 members representing districts of roughly 200,000 Tennesseans each. Elected for four-year, staggered terms in even-numbered years only.

Sine Die: Final adjournment at the completion of a session.

Speaker: The presiding officer of each legislative body. The Lieutenant Governor in the Senate and Speaker of the House are both selected by a majority of their respective members at the beginning of the two-year session.

Sponsor: The legislator who will assume responsibility for moving a bill through the legislative process or taking the bill off notice.

Statute: An act of the legislature adopted pursuant to proper authority and procedure such that it becomes a law.

Subcommittee: A subgroup of a House committee where bills normally begin the legislative process in this legislative body. Although a few Senate committees have subcommittees, most notably Finance, most bills are not heard by a Senate subcommittee.

Substitute and Conform: Once a bill has been approved by either the full House or Senate, the companion bill is heard on the floor of the other legislative body and the sponsor must make this motion to adopt the other version in order to pass identical bills.

Summer Study: A House committee action in which a bill is reviewed and discussed throughout the summer and fall months to gain a better understanding of the issue and how to best address it in the next legislative session. Often this is a means of killing a bill.

Sunset Provision: Provides that a provision or a law is automatically repealed on a specific date unless the General Assembly takes legislative action.

Suspension of the Rules: A parliamentary procedure whereby actions can be taken which would otherwise be out of order. A two-thirds vote of each body present and voting is required to adopt a motion to suspend the rules. Often done at the end of session to speed up the process.

Table: A reference to stopping a bill or amendment from further action. A motion to table cuts off all further debate before a vote is taken.

Veto: Power exercised by the governor to reject legislation passed by both the House and Senate. The General Assembly can override a veto with simple majorities in each legislative body.



Tennessee

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