



## SECTION SIX

# KEY CONTACT PROGRAM

One of the most effective ways to interact with your state legislature is by implementing and using a key contact system. A key contact system is a grassroots network established for the purpose of accessing state legislators as a supplement to or in lieu of a professional lobbyist. The goal is to identify physicians in the state who already have a personal relationship with the legislator or who would be willing to establish that relationship. Once this vital link exists, that physician is designated as the key contact for the legislator, and the physician will be asked to help ensure that legislation of interest is acted on in a manner conducive to the chapter's interests.

### Description

Ideally, the key contact is an emergency physician who has had some previous personal or professional contact with the legislator. For example, the key contact and legislator may have gone to school together or may have children in the same school. They may belong to the same church or synagogue, the same country club, bridge club, or other social club. The key contact's spouse may have had some personal or professional contact with the legislator, such as working in the legislator's

office. The key contact may have treated the legislator or a member of the legislator's family on a professional basis. An emergency physician who has worked on a legislator's campaign can be an excellent candidate to be a key contact. In short, the ideal key contact has an existing personal or professional relationship with the legislator and is amenable to maintaining that relationship on a personal, as well as professional basis.

An emergency physician who is willing to contact a legislator or a legislator's staff is an excellent key contact candidate. Suggestions on how to affect this contact are discussed later. An alternative is to seek a recommendation from the legislator for a key contact. Emergency physicians will be surprised to find that the legislators encourage this working relationship because they are generally uneducated about emergency medicine and welcome the opportunity to have the key contact as a resource to whom they can turn for advice and counsel.

In order to establish an effective key contact system, you must have your goals and methods clearly outlined. The goal is to identify a key contact for each of the state's legislators and to coordinate the system

through the government affairs committee of your state chapter. Every state chapter should have a standing legislative or government affairs committee, whose chairperson will take the responsibility for keeping the key contacts informed of upcoming legislation and who will coordinate the activities of all key contacts.

Initial tasks of the coordinator include the following.

- **Identifying the key legislators in the state, the districts they represent, and potential key contacts who live in those districts.**

ACEP provides chapters with quarterly reports identifying which chapter members live in each state legislative district. This report can be a tremendous help to chapters in locating and recruiting active and interested members to serve as key contacts in as many legislative districts as possible, particularly those districts represented by key legislative leaders and committee chairs. If no members live in some districts, look for hospitals that are located in those districts and try to identify members who work in those hospitals who could serve as key contacts for the legislators representing those districts. A large map of the state is particularly helpful for outlining the various legislative districts as well as highlighting large cities, hospitals, or other landmarks.

- **Contacting potential key contacts.**

Announce the need for key contacts at your chapter's annual meeting. Encourage those emergency physicians who have previous or present contact with a legislator to make themselves known to you so they can be recruited.

Other methods include publishing an announcement in the chapter newsletter, with a form or e-mail address or link asking potential key contacts to send in their name, address, and telephone number if they

have an interest. Finally, the coordinator may need to call some of the larger hospitals or emergency department groups to recruit key contacts. One chapter executive built her key contact system by contacting the ED Director at each hospital and asking them to either serve as a key contact or to recommend someone else who works in that ED to be the key contact.

- **Assembling a starter kit for the key contacts.**

Assume that the key contacts know little about the legislative process and, using the resources of this guide, put together a how-to manual for the prospective key contact. This manual should include a welcome and thank-you letter, a description of the key contact's functions, suggestions on how to make initial contact with the legislator, a biography of the legislator, a primer on the legislative process, a list of the other key contacts in the state, and a "where we go from here" note. Some sample and template starter kit materials are provided at the end of this chapter.

- **Making contact with legislators easy for your members.**

It is vitally important that the coordinator maintain frequent contact with key contacts to keep them informed of legislative action and needs. Chapters can create e-lists of their key contact members to facilitate sending out regular updates and calls for immediate action in contacting legislators about pending legislative action on important issues.

In sending out action alerts to key contacts, chapters can utilize ACEP's online advocacy tool, which allows members to send key advocacy messages to their legislators by email with just a few simple keystrokes. Chapters wishing to utilize this service should contact the ACEP State Legislative Office. Chapters will be

asked to draft a sample message to legislators that they want their key contacts to use. Once the message is provided to ACEP and uploaded onto the online advocacy tool system, chapters can send their key contacts an action alert that explains the issue of concern and directs members how to quickly and easily modify and send the preloaded message directly to their legislators.

ACEP also provides a tool to help key contacts communicate with their legislators at any time. A page on the state advocacy section of the ACEP web site provides contact information for numerous state officials in each district. Members can access this information by [clicking here](#) and entering their zip code.

A newsletter and chapter web sites are also excellent ways of communicating non-urgent information and updates on legislative activities.

You can also supply your key contacts with wallet or Rolodex cards with their legislators' names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses.

- **Getting Feedback on Your Key Contacts' Activities.**

To help determine how active and effective your key contact program is, you will want to develop a formal or informal system for encouraging and collecting feedback from your key contacts whenever they communicate with their legislators. Ask your key contacts to copy you on correspondence they send or to alert you about any conversations or meetings that may have taken place, and what the content of those discussions were. Knowing what was discussed and how legislators reacted to the issue can be extremely helpful in refining your advocacy strategy. Let your key contacts know that their feedback is an important component

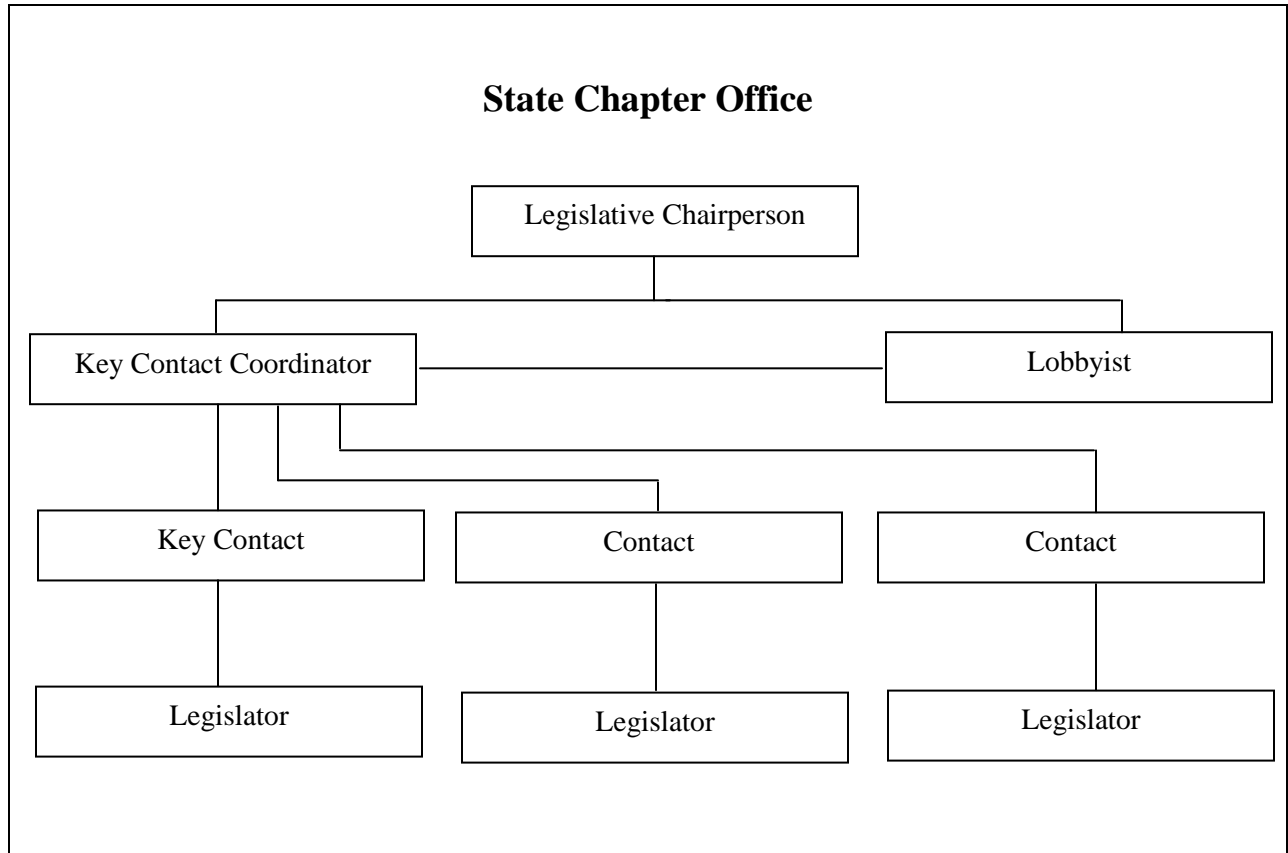
to your overall state advocacy program.

- **Maintaining Your Key Contact Database.**

Once you've built a key contact program, occasional efforts will be needed to ensure that your database of members is up to date and that your program functions at the highest possible level. As some key contacts inevitably move or retire, you will want to try to keep track of such developments and try to replace them with other members from those districts. If your key contact system is limited in size but includes coverage of key districts where legislative leaders reside, you will want to make sure you still have key contacts in the right districts in case state election results or redistricting changes the political landscape. A chapter executive, other chapter staff or volunteer leader could serve this role in ensuring the current key contact membership covers the proper districts and is as large and as effective as possible.

## Organization

Organization is vital to a successful key contact system. A suggested flow chart is shown below. All key contacts should report to the coordinator who, acting in cooperation with the state lobbyist (if one exists), ultimately reports to the legislative chairperson. From time to time, you may wish to distribute an "action alert" through the appropriate coordinators to the key contacts. If the key contact system is large enough, you may elect to identify several coordinators and divide the state into districts. Under this scenario, however, be sure to coordinate all key contact activities through the legislative chairperson (or some similar central figure).



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# Key Contact Starter Kit Template

## Sample Welcome Letter to Key Contacts

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_:

Thank you for agreeing to participate as a member of the state key contact system for the \_\_\_\_\_ chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians. Your active participation in this program will significantly support our efforts to effectively advocate on behalf of emergency medicine and the patients we serve.

As a key contact, your primary role is to ensure that state legislators in your district are aware of the emergency medicine perspective on key issues identified by the chapter. When a significant issue arises, members of the key contact system will be provided with information about the issue so they can communicate with their legislators and solicit their support for the chapter's position.

The most effective key contacts are those who lawmakers come to know and trust. You can achieve this status by establishing and maintaining relationships with your legislators so that you become a credible and valuable resource on issues related to emergency care. Meeting with legislators in their home districts or hosting them for a visit to an emergency department are excellent ways to foster such a relationship and to educate these key policymakers about the problems and issues plaguing the emergency care system in the state.

Attached is contact and biographical information about the legislators in your district. We encourage you to make contact with them as soon as possible to introduce yourself and set up an initial meeting. We are also including a primer on the legislative process in the state and other resources that should be helpful to you in enhancing your effectiveness as a key contact.

Of course, your chapter leadership is also available to assist you in any way we can. If you should have any questions, concerns or issues, please feel free to contact the chapter office or us at any time.

Thank you again for your participation in this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chapter President  
Contact Information

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chapter Legislative Committee Chair  
Contact Information

## Key Functions of the Key Contact

Typical key contact activities include:

- Communicate with assigned legislators by phone, e-mail, or in person several times a year. These communications may be general in nature or issue specific.
- Familiarize yourself with assigned legislators' political views, interests, committee assignments, and preferred means of interaction with constituents.
- Understand the legislative process.
- Review key contact alerts and contact assigned legislators in a timely manner to provide the chapter's perspective on the issue and to seek the legislators' support.
- Provide feedback to the chapter on interactions with assigned legislators and their reaction to the chapter's position.
- Stay abreast of key emergency medicine issues, particularly those pending before the legislature.
- Serve as a resource to assigned legislators in educating them about emergency medicine.
- Remember that you are a representative of the chapter in interactions with legislators and that personal opinions in opposition to the chapter's position should never be expressed in these interactions.

### **Contact Information on Your Legislators**

*(Information may be available through state legislative web sites or published legislative guides)*

**Representative:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Capitol Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

District Office Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Capitol E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Other E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Capitol Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

District Office Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**Senator:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Capitol Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

District Office Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Capitol E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Other E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Capitol Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

District Office Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Biographical Information on Your Legislator**

*(Information may be available through state legislative web sites or published legislative guides)*

**Representative** \_\_\_\_\_

Political Party:

Hometown:

Age:

Occupation:

Education:

Family Status:

Legislative Positions Held/Committee Membership:

Voting History Related to Emergency Care Priority Issues:  
*(Information to be supplied by chapter lobbyist and/or leaders)*

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**Senator** \_\_\_\_\_

Political Party:

Hometown:

Age:

Occupation:

Education:

Family Status:

Legislative Positions Held/Committee Membership:

Voting History Related to Emergency Care Priority Issues:  
*(Information to be supplied by chapter lobbyist and/or leaders)*

**Understanding the Legislative Process in the State of** \_\_\_\_\_



*(Information may be obtained from the state legislative web site, a legislative guide, chapter lobbyist, chapter leaders or the state medical society)*

**Items in this section should include:**

- Frequency/Duration of Legislative Sessions
- Special Sessions
- Chambers of the Legislature
- Leadership in the Legislature
- Committees in the Legislature (identify those most likely to deal with emergency care issues)
- Introduction of Bills
- Referral of Bills to Committee
- Committee Procedures
- Amendments
- Floor Debate/Vote
- Consideration by the Second Chamber
- The Governor

**How to Communicate with Your Legislator**

### **Meeting Your Legislator in Person:**

It is always preferable to meet your assigned legislator for the first time in an informal, in-person meeting where there is no pressing agenda. Ideally, this meeting should be arranged in the legislator's home district, free from the distractions and competing demands associated with a meeting in his or her legislative office.

### **Setting up and holding an introductory meeting:**

- Call the legislator's district office to set up a brief meeting, providing as much advance notice as possible.
- Explain the purpose of your meeting, such as to meet the legislator and talk briefly about the state of emergency care in his district.
- At the beginning of the meeting, introduce yourself as a constituent and establish your credentials as an emergency physician who wants to ensure that the people in your community have access to the best emergency care possible.
- Be prepared to discuss the current state of emergency care in your hospital, including any pressing issues. While ideally, the first meeting should not focus on specific legislative initiatives, be prepared to respond in the event the legislator brings up the subject.
- Do not assume that your legislator knows anything about emergency care and avoid medical jargon or acronyms.
- Throughout the conversation, focus your concerns on patients (not yourself or the physician community). Your patients are your legislator's constituents, and he should share your concerns.
- Offer to be an ongoing resource to your legislator on any health care related issue.
- Give your legislator your business card or provide your contact information.
- Keep the meeting short and do not exceed the amount of time allotted for the meeting, unless the legislator wants to extend the meeting.
- Follow up your meeting with a thank you note to be sent via mail or e-mail.

### **How to Speak to Your Legislator:**

In all communications with a legislator, key contacts should always be honest and gracious. You want to build an ongoing relationship with the legislator in which you become a trusted resource. Even if the legislator disagrees with the chapter's position on an issue, a key contact should always remain polite and respectful. After all, there will be other issues in which that legislator's support will be wanted.

Additional tips on speaking to your legislator include:

- Conversations on the phone and in the legislator's office need to be concise and to the point.
- When talking about a specific piece of legislation, identify the number of the bill you are discussing, the contents of the bill and the chapter's position on the bill.
- Whenever possible, provide an anecdote from your own experience that illustrates the importance of the issue and its impact on emergency care in the legislator's district.
- If you don't know the answer to a legislator's question, tell the legislator you don't know but that you will try to get an answer. Immediately after the meeting, contact the chapter to try to get the needed information and follow up with the legislator.
- Avoid any and all references to past or future financial support for the legislator's campaign or participation in any fundraising events.