

# Hosting Legislative Visits

## A toolkit for members

Every year, a number of legislative and regulatory proposals are introduced that have large impacts on older adult care and services. Your State Senators and Representatives (i.e.: legislators) are the deciding voters in Springfield on these important issues, let alone may sometimes be the authors of such legislation. As such, LeadingAge Illinois strongly encourages ALL members host your legislators to build and maintain a strong, beneficial relationship.

LeadingAge Illinois works on your behalf to pass legislation that provides solutions to member challenges and defeat legislation that places undue burden on providers and residents. As a member, you play a vital role in helping us accomplish this work. You do this by participating in our email campaigns, advocacy day events, and by holding a legislative visit in your community as a part of the LeadingAge Illinois **Partners in Quality** program.





## What is the program?

Since the inception of the Partners in Quality program in 2006, LeadingAge Illinois members have held over 650 legislative visits in their communities! This program has been so successful that LeadingAge Illinois is THE association legislators reach out to when seeking care for their loved ones.

- The goal of the program is to invite legislators at the state and federal levels into communities to see, firsthand, the quality care and services provided to older adults in their district.
- Through this program, LeadingAge Illinois staff and members have been able to establish and strengthen relationships with legislators who make decisions that impact older adult care and services.
- Photos and articles on each visit are placed in LeadingAge Illinois bi-weekly newsletter, The Lead, and on our social media channels, bringing positive exposure to your community.



## Why host a visit?

- LeadingAge Illinois and our members are trusted voices for the older adult care and services field and an important part of our mission is to advocate for public policies that address the challenges faced by you, our members, and the older adults you serve.
- It is important for your legislators to see firsthand the issues that you, your staff, and your residents face on a day-to-day basis. If appropriate, you should invite your legislators to special events at your community. This gives you the opportunity to talk to the legislator in a more social setting, one that shows you providing services to residents.
- Many members of the Illinois General Assembly and U.S. Congress have never visited or toured a senior living community, so there is an opportunity to invite them in to see how a community cares for residents and staff. It is imperative for legislators to tour a community because their visit may impact their views on policy issues. Hosting a legislator at a community is a great way to educate representatives and/or senators about what senior living is, the numerous benefits it offers to older adults, and the workforce opportunities it provides for staff. This is an effective grassroots activity that can encourage legislators to support providers and our mission to protect and advance the industry.
- As part of the visit, introduce the legislator to staff (nurses, therapists, dietitians, CNAs, etc.) so they can briefly explain their roles and help further educate the legislators. The visits are also a way to discuss legislative or regulatory issues impacting the community in the very setting and in front of the very people that are impacted. Be sure to check with LeadingAge Illinois prior to planning a visit with your legislator so you can be provided an update on crucial issues, the legislator's positions on those issues, and other pertinent information.
- If you find it appropriate, we recommend using the visit as an opportunity for legislators to address a gathering of residents and update them on activities in the district or in Springfield.
- Offer to be a resource for your legislators on issues impacting older adult care and services. Ideally, we would like the legislators to think of your community when voting on bills that impact you.
- Relationship building with your legislator shouldn't be a 'one and done' type of interaction. Invite them back, ideally 2-3 times a year. This is about them getting to know you and see your good work.





## How to invite your legislator

The first thing you have to do is identify which legislator you plan to invite for a tour. We recommend you identify the state representative, state senator, U.S. representative, and U.S. senator(s) that represent the district in which your community is located. If you do not know who your legislators are or how to get in touch with their office, LeadingAge Illinois would be happy to assist you.

- Send out an invitation email requesting their presence for a community tour. We have prepared a template letter for you to use (see next page).
- Clearly state some potential dates for your desired meeting and your interest in having the legislator come to your community for a tour and discussion.
- Follow up with a phone call to the legislator's office if you don't receive a response to your email.
- Legislators' schedules at home are heavily focused on meeting with constituents, so it's okay to press the scheduler for a meeting. They come home from Springfield and DC for this purpose and enjoy smaller, intimate conversations with the people they represent.
- You may not be able to confirm the appointment immediately, so get the contact information and tell them you will continue to check in with them. Once scheduled, be sure to clarify how long the legislator can spend at your community. At least an hour is ideal.





# Resources to help you plan your visit

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## Sample visit invitation letter

Honorable (NAME)  
Illinois State (Representative / Senator)  
District Address

Dear Representative (NAME) or Senator (NAME):

As the (TITLE) of (ORGANIZATION) located at (ADDRESS), and on behalf of our staff and residents, I would like to invite you to visit our community on a date and time that best fits your schedule. We would like to request approximately an hour so that you may hear more about the seniors that we serve.

As part of the visit, we invite you to interact with our staff and educate our residents on the work you do in Springfield on their behalf. If your schedule allows, we invite you to participate in a tour of our community.

We look forward to hearing back from you on a date and time that you can make a visit.

Sincerely,

NAME  
TITLE

cc: LeadingAge Illinois

### Variations:

Offering a specific already-planned event, date, time for the legislator to attend. Such planned events can include ice cream socials, garden parties, craft events, community-outreach events, and more. If you have the opportunity to have the legislator participate in the event, such as scooping ice cream, it provides them the opportunity to interact socially with many people at one time.



## Sample visit ideas

You will most likely have limited time with the legislator, so it's important to be thoughtful about how to structure the time that they are at your community. These events don't come around very often, and you want to take full advantage of the opportunity!

- **Introductions.** Meet the legislator in the lobby or front entrance of the community. Since they are often coming from another meeting or engagement, they are running on a tight schedule, so you may want to offer them water and a chance to gather themselves with you with some light opening conversation.
- **Gatherings of residents and staff.** Legislators always want to visit with the residents. One of the best ways to make that possible is to post signs leading up to the visit letting residents know the date and time the legislator will be there and where they can gather to meet them. You can find each legislator's bio at [www.ilga.gov](http://www.ilga.gov) which you can use when introducing the legislator to residents and staff at the gathering. You can then allow the legislator to make remarks or give an update and facilitate questions from residents/staff.
- **Community Tour.** It is always great to provide the legislator with a tour of the community, even if only a short one showcases areas you are proud of. As you walk through, you can discuss the care and services you provide and they can see or get an idea of them in action, firsthand. During the tour is also an opportunity to discuss issues while directly in the settings impacted by them.
- **Meetings with leadership.** If you feel comfortable and time allows, you can hold a brief meeting with the legislator in an office or conference room to go over, uninterrupted, issues and challenges the field faces.



# What are your specific asks during the visit?



It is important to work closely with LeadingAge Illinois as you prepare for your community visit.

LeadingAge Illinois will be able to provide current insight on specifics that should be raised with the legislator, along with background information about that legislator's relationship with LeadingAge Illinois and older adult care and services.

LeadingAge Illinois works on many critical issues and can help you come up with a list of topics to discuss with the legislator. By identifying two or three timely issues that are relevant to your community, the current legislative environment, and are of unique interest to your legislator, your visit will be more productive. LeadingAge Illinois will work closely with you to identify those topics.



# Sample thank you letter/email

Honorable (NAME)  
Illinois State (Representative / Senator)  
District Address

Dear Representative (NAME) or Senator (NAME):

(ORGANIZATION NAME) thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to visit with us on (DATE). It was a pleasure to have you meet our staff and residents. We enjoyed meeting with you and hope to continue to serve as a resource to you and your staff in regards to the constituents in your district that receive our important community service.

Again, thank you for visiting our community as well as your commitment to the advancement of quality older adult services in Illinois. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

NAME  
TITLE

cc: LeadingAge Illinois





# Sample press release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
DATE  
CONTACT – PHONE - EMAIL

(YOUR ORGANIZATION NAME) HOSTS LOCAL LEGISLATOR

CITY, IL – (ORGANIZATION NAME) hosted (LEGISLATOR NAME) on (DATE)

During this visit, (ORGANIZATION LEADER NAME/TITLE) stressed (ORGANIZATION NAME) commitment to quality care and services that seniors and their loved ones can trust.

“As we look to the future, we believe that quality should be an automatic public expectation,” said (ORGANIZATION LEADER NAME). We are always pursuing new ways to enhance quality on behalf of the seniors we serve and their families and we are pleased that (LEGISLATOR NAME) has taken the time to visit with our staff and residents to see, first-hand, what quality looks like in older adult services.”

(INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION HERE)





# Resources



Illinois General Assembly Website: [www.ilga.gov](http://www.ilga.gov)



U.S. Congress: [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov)



LeadingAge Illinois [Advocacy Center](#): Find our board approved public policy priorities and [Legislative Tracker](#).



**Reach out with questions  
or to share your success stories**

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