The American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) and its affiliates, the Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology (SART), the Society for Male Reproduction and Urology (SMRU), the Society for Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility (SREI), the Society of Reproductive Biologists and Technologists (SRBT), and the Society of Reproductive Surgeons (SRS), work together to advance the science and practice of reproductive medicine.

As part of this mission, ASRM’s Office of Public Affairs directs its efforts at educating lawmakers and the press about the importance of treatments for infertility, including the rights of medical professionals to provide treatment and the rights of patients to access treatment. These education efforts also strive to address the burdens imposed on both patients and medical professionals, such as financial barriers that limit patients’ abilities to access care, and unduly restrictive regulations which single out this area of medicine.

In recent years, we have witnessed new challenges to our mission: misconceptions about the disease of infertility persist; unwarranted regulations of the practice of reproductive medicine are proposed; restrictions on third-party reproduction and compensation to egg or sperm donors are debated; and attempts have been made to define a fertilized egg as a person. All of these threats serve to illustrate the importance of our members becoming more actively involved in protecting the field of reproductive medicine.

We have also seen a significant increase in legislative activity on issues of importance to our organizations in state legislatures across the country. The importance of your involvement in the lobbying process, especially at the local level, has never been greater. We welcome and rely on you as a partner in this critical component of the work that we do. You are your own best advocate.
Know Your Organization and Its Issues
It is vitally important that you be a credible representative. You are an expert on the service you provide to patients. Your work in reproductive medicine is challenging, but it is important too that you be fully aware of ASRM’s positions on issues ranging from access to care, financing of care, and reproductive rights, including the right of patients to choose third-party reproduction, and the right of patients to make embryo disposition decisions. Familiarize yourself with our positions on a variety of reproductive issues by visiting www.asrm.org and selecting “Media and Public Affairs” under the “About Us” tab.

Know Your Opposition
It is important to anticipate the opposition’s position on an issue on which you and your organization take a position. Think of ways to respond to the opposition’s arguments positively before those arguments surface publicly; or, at least be able to affect your legislator’s position of the opposition’s point of view.

Know Your Legislator
Make an attempt to understand the basis for your legislator’s positions, which may include his or her party, position, and tenure in the legislature; constituent pressures; record on related legislation and recorded votes; career background; or general predispositions. Research the committees on which he or she serves and list which bills he or she is sponsoring, endorsing, or opposing. Lobbying to convince an individual of the merits of your position requires an understanding of the rationale which supports that belief. Your goal is to influence on the basis of your knowledge and understanding of the issues, while also anticipating the position the legislator is likely to take on the issues.

Know the Process
Most state legislatures open their sessions in January. But some convene in later months, and a few do not have a regular session every year. Learn when your state legislature is in session and its projected adjournment date for the year. A number of states are in session for a short number of weeks in a given year, and a lot can occur in that time frame.

There are many opportunities to attempt to influence an issue. These include when a bill is being drafted, after it has been formally introduced, when it is referred to a committee with jurisdiction, and when hearings are held and the committee is accepting testimony in support of or against it (whether in person or in writing). Additional opportunities arise prior to a vote on the bill, or refer to the other chamber, where the path to a final vote usually follows the same route through committee and floor action. This chamber may approve the revised legislation, but it is important to remember that the other chamber also has a right to approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or change it. This chamber may also have the power to change the bill’s scope or its path through the legislative process. It may approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or change it. This chamber may also have the power to change the bill’s scope or its path through the legislative process.

Prior to a vote on the bill, or referral to the other chamber, where the path to a final vote becomes necessary to contact them on an issue to which you have a personal interest. If there are a number of ways you can initiate the process of building relationships. You can register to receive your legislator’s email address and constituent newsletters. You can call your legislator’s office or his or her staff at the state capitol in order to introduce yourself and offer to serve as a source of information about infertility and its treatment. Alternatively, you can invite your elected representative to visit your medical practice and tour your facilities. Making regular contact will help build a relationship between you and your legislator. Over time, you will become a part of the legislator’s support system and he/she might even come to you for advice.

Always remember: you have something to offer. The topic of infertility’s unfairly and unnecessarily lambasting a campaign or policy. However, your perspective, as an expert in the field of reproductive medicine, is a member of the community, can help policy makers better understand a complex topic. Legislators want to hear from you. Nothing is more important to an elected official than the concerns of his or her constituents. Identify your own strengths or expertise on the subject of legislation under consideration. Do not muddle the message with your points on various issues, even if they all relate to reproductive medicine.

Be brief. Your letter, call, or email need not be lengthy. In a phone call, take no longer than one minute to state what you want and why you want it. If you challenge yourself to deliver the message in under a minute, you will boil it down to its essence. A written communication regarding an issue should also be succinct and to the point. In both, you should be courteous and reasonable.

Join Forces
Another very effective lobbying strategy is to partner with other groups or organizations with common concerns or a common support for a particular issue.

Join your state medical society. Your state medical society not only provides you with an important voice; it offers the opportunity to work collaboratively on issues of mutual concern.

Your own best advocate.
For more information, visit www.asrm.org

What can our members do to advocate for their profession and the rights of their infertile patients?

Vote
While it may sound obvious, it is important that you become educated on the policy positions of the candidates running in your area. Take the time to review each candidate’s platform and follow up on any ads or campaign literature that might come up during a campaign. However, whether in person or in writing, additional opportunities arise prior to a vote on the bill, or refer to the other chamber, where the path to a final vote usually follows the same route through committee and floor action. This chamber may approve the revised legislation, but it is important to remember that the other chamber also has a right to approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or change it. This chamber may also have the power to change the bill’s scope or its path through the legislative process. It may approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or change it. This chamber may also have the power to change the bill’s scope or its path through the legislative process.

Formalize Your Contact
Write letters, make phone calls, and send emails regarding the issue, and encourage your colleagues to do the same. Here are some tips for effective communication:

Be selective. When sending a formal communication, clearly identify the one issue. We like to discuss and then share how the issue affects you, your practice, and your patients. Identify your own strengths or expertise on the subject of legislation under consideration. Do not muddle the message with your points on various issues, even if they all relate to reproductive medicine.

Be brief. Your letter, call, or email need not be lengthy. In a phone call, take no longer than one minute to state what you want and why you want it. If you challenge yourself to deliver the message in under a minute, you will boil it down to its essence. A written communication regarding an issue should also be succinct and to the point. In both, you should be courteous and reasonable.

Utilize Your Resources
ASRM’s Office of Public Affairs is ready to assist you in your lobbying efforts and to help you coordinate your message. The Office of Public Affairs, based in Washington, DC, employs a staff of professional lobbyists. We subscribe to a service that helps us track legislation at the federal and state levels and a complimentary service that will help bolster conversations with state representatives on Capitol Hill and to state lawmakers.

Keep apprised of your lobbying activities at the state level. We welcome your news of your contacts with state legislators, knowledge of existing personal relationships and new ones, copies of your written communications, and news of your lobbying challenges and successes. When you share this information with us, we are able to pass along pointers to your colleagues in other states who are advocating on similar issues.

Know the status of the legislation. Refer to a bill by number whenever possible.

Remember that a legislator’s time is limited, as is the time of his or her staff.

Write the chair or members of a committee holding hearings on legislation in which you are interested if you have facts that you think should influence their thinking.

Write to say you approve, not just to criticize or oppose.