

Getting to Know MNA's New Lobbyist, Jamie DeMarco

By Ron Santana (MNA Director of Marketing & Communications)



During the Maryland Nurses Association (MNA) 122nd Annual Convention Open Annual Meeting, members were clear about one thing: strong, consistent advocacy in Annapolis matters—now more than ever. As nurses face ongoing workforce challenges, patient care pressures, and major state-level policy decisions, the call for continued legislative representation during the 2026 Maryland General Assembly was both urgent and unified. The MNA Board of Directors heard that message and reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring nurses have a powerful voice in shaping state policy.

To help lead this work, MNA has engaged a new lobbyist for the 2026 legislative session, Jamie DeMarco of DeMarco Advocacy.

Can you share your professional background and what led you to advocate specifically for healthcare and nursing in Maryland? What are your goals in working with the MNA?

I was raised in a household with a firm commitment to public health advocacy. Both of my parents worked in public health; my mom focused on curbing harmful drinking practices on college campuses, and my dad runs the Maryland Citizens Health Initiative.

I got my start organizing to reduce pollution from fossil fuels. I volunteered on and eventually helped to run grassroots campaigns to deploy more clean energy in Maryland. I now run my own one-person lobby shop in Annapolis, where I exclusively represent mission-driven organizations working to make the world a better place. I am drawn to MNA because it is a membership-based organization with a mission near and dear to my health: improving working conditions for nurses and public

health outcomes in Maryland.

From your perspective, what are the most important legislative priorities for nurses and patients in Maryland during this session—and why are they so urgent right now? What specific bills should nurses be watching?

Now is a critically important time for nurses to be involved in Annapolis. The state faces a \$1.5 billion deficit, and unlike the federal Government, it is required to have a balanced budget every year. Every elected official has made clear that tax increases are off the table, so the state will have to cut \$15 Billion in spending this year. As these lawmakers decide what to cut, MNA will be advocating to defend Medicaid funding. Medicaid is crucial to ensuring that low-income Marylanders have health insurance and are able to get preventative treatment.

Another priority of MNA this legislative session is addressing the nurse staffing crisis. Too many of our members are working long shifts with an insufficient number of nurses, following staffing plans that simply aren't working. The Safe Staffing Act of 2026 (SB 0411 / HB 0624) would require every hospital system to create a staffing plan with input from the nurses and other frontline staff. These plans will improve working conditions and staffing shortages because they will be written with input from our members and those most impacted by the staffing shortage.

Our third priority is to ensure surgical smoke evacuation systems are used during surgeries. 90% of surgeries require cauterization, which creates smoke and particulate pollution. For the nurses in the operating room, exposure to this pollution can be the equivalent of smoking a pack of cigarettes. Most operating rooms

already have smoke evacuation devices installed, but many hospitals allow surgeons to choose not to use them. The Surgical Smoke Act (HB 1087) would simply require hospitals to use smoke evacuation devices that are already mostly installed. This will improve the health and safety of surgery nurses at no additional cost to anyone.

For nurses who want to be involved but aren't sure where to start, what is the most effective way they can make their voices heard during the legislative session?

Lawmakers aren't mind readers. They don't know what you want them to do unless you tell them. By far the most effective way to make a difference is to come to Annapolis and meet with your lawmakers face-to-face. MNA's Nursing Legislative Night is scheduled for March 16. We will have good food and good company for a good cause. It will be a blast, and I highly encourage everyone to attend.

MNA has a legislative committee, and each district has a representative. If you want to help MNA accomplish its legislative priorities, reach out to your district legislative committee representative and find a time to connect one-on-one.

You can also always simply pick up the phone and call your state lawmakers. They carefully count how many phone calls they get on each subject, and at the state level, very few calls can make a huge difference. If an office gets five phone calls in support of an issue, that is practically a landslide of public support. I know it can be scary to pick up the phone, but it will make a difference if you make the call. ■