

Nurses in Action: Advocacy at the Statehouse and Beyond



Marissa Bartmess, PhD, RN, Commission Chair for Public Policy/Legislation, SCNA

February at the SCNA was filled with advocacy, momentum, and meaningful connection. On February 26, 2026, SCNA held its annual Legislative Day at the statehouse, followed by our first policy & practice event, *“From Practice to Politics: Empowering Nurses to Lead & Serve,”* in partnership with Healing Politics.



Legislative Day

Legislative Day was a powerful and inspiring day of action. Thank you to everyone who attended, volunteered, and advocated! We had 200 attendees, with even more registered to support the effort. Our collective presence made a strong impression on lawmakers and the public. We even made the news! Be sure to check out the coverage from WLTX News 19 online.

Since Legislative Day, momentum has continued to build. Five additional legislators have signed on as sponsors for House Bill 3580, the Full Practice Authority (FPA) companion bill to Senate Bill 45. During the event, we delivered legislative packets filled with advocacy materials to every member of the South Carolina legislature, ensuring our priorities were heard.

Now, we ask you to keep the advocacy going. Continue contacting your legislators and urging them to support our pol-

icy priorities, especially Senate Bill 45 and House Bill 3580, which support Full Practice Authority for APRNs. Advocacy guides to help you take action are available in the SCNA app, so be sure to download it, if you have not already, to access these valuable member-only resources.

Legislative Day is only impactful because of members like YOU. We need your voice and presence there every year, and we encourage you to bring a nursing colleague. Tell your co-workers about us, and if you know a nurse who is not a member of the SCNA, encourage them to join. When nurses show up together, we are a force of power, advocacy, and strength for our profession and the communities we serve. Legislative Day is also an incredible opportunity to connect with fellow nurses and strengthen South Carolina’s nursing community. We look forward to seeing you at our next Legislative Day on February 3, 2027! Please remember that the SCNA is also engaged in federal-level advocacy, and we want you to join us there as well. Mark your calendars for Hill Day in Washington, D.C., on June 25, as we bring South Carolina’s nursing voice to the national stage. Hill Day is a free event that allows you to lend your voice on a national stage.

From Practice to Politics: Empowering Nurses to Lead & Serve

After Legislative Day, we continued the momentum with a learning and networking event, *From Practice to Politics: Empowering Nurses to Lead & Serve*, hosted in partnership with Healing Politics at the SCNA office in Columbia.

Healing Politics is a nonpartisan campaign school for nurses and midwives that prepares nurses to run for office and lead

through civic engagement. After learning about civic engagement and running for office, we had the chance to hear from incredible nurses and a wonderful nurse ally who successfully ran for office:

- Naida Rutherford, current Richland County Coroner and nurse practitioner
- Stephanie Burgess, former school board member for Richland County School District 2, nurse practitioner, and PhD-prepared nurse
- Derrek Pugh, current Richland County Council member, Vice Chair, District 2, and Allen University Adjunct Professor

We ended the day with a wonderful reception sponsored by Kelly Willenburg and Associates (a nurse-led business!). This inspiring event was at full capacity, with 40 nurses in attendance. It was encouraging to see so many nurses join us for this half-day event after advocating at the Statehouse. A full day of advocacy in action, indeed!

But don’t just take our word for it. Read what attendees had to say about their experience and the lasting impact these events had on them.



La'Quandra Ramper-sant, DNP, MSN, APRN, FNP-C, PMHNP-BC

Attending the South Carolina Nurses Association

Legislative Day and the Healing Politics event, From Practice to Politics: Empowering Nurses to Lead & Serve, was both inspiring and affirming. As a Doctor of Nursing Practice prepared nurse practitioner, educator, and community health advocate, these experiences reinforced the vital role nurses play beyond the bedside. Hearing directly from legislators and nurse leaders highlighted how policy decisions influence patient outcomes,

healthcare access, and the future of the nursing workforce.

The Healing Politics session was especially meaningful because it emphasized the importance of nurses using their voices to advocate for equitable healthcare systems and stronger communities. It reminded me that our clinical experiences provide a powerful perspective that can inform policy and drive meaningful change.

Participating in these events strengthened my commitment to continued civic engagement and professional advocacy. Moving forward, I plan to remain actively involved in legislative efforts that support nursing practice, address health disparities, and improve outcomes for underserved populations. These experiences reaffirmed that when nurses engage in policy conversations, we help shape a healthier future for our patients, communities, and profession.



Keith R. Gunter BSN, RN, SCRN

Attending both Legislative Day and the Healing Politics event was a

transformative and impactful experience. As a nurse and an educator committed to improving patient outcomes and advocacy in our profession, these events provided the paramount opportunity of witnessing how nurses impact health policy and influence legislative decisions.

Legislative Day was a powerful experience that provided opportunity to engage directly with our colleagues and state legislators. It was truly inspiring to

not only experience the effort and hours logged, but to see all the work come to fruition. I was even able to bring current nursing students so they could witness SCNA in action. Seeing and hearing the recognition to South Carolina's amazing nurses from the Senate floor is an experience we will not forget.

The Healing Politics event complemented Legislative Day by emphasizing the importance of nursing as a profession to actively engage in the political environment of today. I was fascinated by the plethora of opportunities available and inspired by the panel of speakers who shared their experience and their strength with us.

As a professional who has frequently experienced frustration with the current climate, these events have inspired me to realize that we all have a voice. Being a part of change is a matter of where we choose to use that voice. These events have prompted me to not only join the SCNA Legislative Committee, but to volunteer on a political campaign. Thank you SCNA and Healing Politics for helping me find my voice.



Theresa J. Lee, MHA, CCMA, University of South Carolina, Pre-Licensure MSN Student

As soon as I got in my car after South Carolina Legislative Day, tears rolled down my face. It was truly an unforgettable experience. As a pre-licensure nursing student, being able to advocate alongside the South Carolina Nurses Association at the State House felt like

the opportunity of a lifetime. Standing in a room filled with passionate nurses who were actively lobbying for policies that impact patient care and the nursing profession was powerful.

One moment that deeply impacted me was personally handing a proposal packet to a senator and asking for their partnership in advancing policies that support full practice authority for nurses, protection against workplace violence, and safer surgical environments through smoke evacuation measures. In that moment, I realized that nurses truly have the ability to influence meaningful change.

This experience solidified my commitment to professional advocacy and confirmed that becoming involved with SCNA after graduation is not optional for me, it is essential. Legislative Day showed me that nursing leadership extends beyond the bedside, and it inspired me to use my voice to advocate for patients, nurses, and the future of our profession.

Conclusion

The momentum we built in February is only the beginning. Now is the time to stay engaged. Contact your legislators, invite a colleague to join SCNA, and continue showing up for the future of nursing in South Carolina. When nurses unite in advocacy and leadership, our voices become impossible to ignore. We look forward to continuing this momentum together as we strengthen the voice of nursing across South Carolina. ■

PAPIN Peer Assistance Program in Nursing

Nurses Helping Nurses



Peer Assistance Program in Nursing (PAPIN) is a support group for nurses with substance use disorders. It collaborates with the Recovering Professionals Program (RPP) assisting nurses in getting their professional and personal lives back on track to sustain the recovery abilities of nurse participants across South Carolina.

PAPIN meets every 2nd Tuesday of the month, virtually at 5:30PM. For meeting access and other helpful information go to <https://www.scnurses.org/page/PAPIN>