ASURA’s Legislature Liaison

This material was prepared in March 2013 and includes extensive input from Alan Johnson, a past Legislature / ASRS Liaison.

General Information
The Legislature Liaison acts as agents of the Board to provide liaison and advocacy in relation to the Arizona Legislature. Per the ASURA Bylaws, the Liaison is charged to exert influence on targeted agencies as approved by the ASURA Board and in consultation with the ASURA officers.

A. Membership
The Liaison serves at the pleasure of the ASURA Board.

B. Meetings
The Arizona Legislature is in session from January through May/June.

C. Areas of Concern
ASURA has been concerned chiefly with legislation in the Arizona Legislature in three areas:
- ASU, usually its annual budget;
- retirement benefits from the ASRS; and
- sometimes various issues involving public education at the pre-university and community-college levels.

D. Sources of Information
There are a variety of sources that need to be periodically checked.
- sundeviladvocates.org – the site gives information about ASU’s needs;
- azasrs.gov - the site presents ASRS bills and external threats to benefits,
- arizonaea.org - the website of the Arizona Education Association gives insight into what’s going on in the Legislature regarding school and community-college legislation, and
- azleg.gov – this site provides a list of all bills, extensive information about any particular bill and its progress through the legislative process from committee hearings through "floor" votes in the chamber of its origin and, if the bill passes there, on through the same process in the second chamber

E. Gathering Information
The ASURA Liaison has merely to go to the ASU and AEA websites and sign up to receive their newsletters. The ASRS website publishes the agendas and minutes of meetings of its Board of Directors and its External Affairs Committee, which prepares bills beginning in the late fall for Board approval and submission to the Legislature, which convenes in January.

In the late fall the Legislative Liaison surveys the three information sources and other relevant sources such as the local newspaper for prospective legislation of
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interest to ASURA and, at least by early January, submits a list of bills to support or oppose to ASURA's Board for their approval.

F. Supporting or Opposing a Bill
To support or oppose a bill in the Legislature, the Liaison at a minimum will first express support or opposition in committee hearings for the bill. The Legislature’s website enables any citizen to find out in what committees and when and where any given bill will be heard. The website provides a "request to speak" regarding a bill in a particular committee meeting. The Liaison simply types in his statement (briefly) and it will be transmitted to the whole committee. If the Liaison wants to speak to the committee in person, he indicates this in his request, attends the meeting, and is allowed to speak if the committee chairperson opens the floor for public comments. Even if the Liaison doesn't choose to speak in person, attendance at meetings is an important sign of support or opposition.

After a bill proceeds from committee hearings to "floor" votes, the Liaison may want to e-mail particular legislators with support for or opposition to a bill. When e-mailing it is important to use a personal and not ASU e-mail address. If the Liaison wants to do more, he may make appointments with individual legislators ahead of the hearing of a bill or may organize ASURA members to write letters, send e-mails (using personal not ASU e-mail addresses), or telephone advocacy to legislators. Being informed, showing up at the Legislature, and mentioning that ASURA has lots of members eventually produces some recognition of our organization and its wishes.

G. Registering as a Lobbyist
The ASURA Liaisons have always been Registered Lobbyists with the Arizona Secretary of State. This status is not absolutely necessary as any citizen may address the Legislature, but official status shows that we’re serious, and registration is free to us and not too hard to do. The downside--quarterly reports, although very simple, have to be filed via internet. See http://www.azsos.gov/election/lobbyist/lobbyisthandbook.pdf for detailed information about registering and the rules of conduct for Registered Lobbyists.

H. Working Together
ASURA’s new Bylaws list one Legislative Liaison person rather than the previous Legislative Liaison Council. The job often requires two or three people working together. When studying what to support or oppose, the two or three can test out their views on each other; trips to the Legislature can get lonesome for one person; and it was often convenient to have an informed substitute to deliver a report to the ASURA Board. The Liaison could seek help informally or an ad hoc Council could be initiated. It is desirable that the four ASURA Liaisons (Legislature, ASRS, ADOA Health Insurance, and ASRS Health Insurance) work together.