

# Trusted Voices for Residents and Clients: Advocacy Success Stories

## How Building Key Relationships Pays Off

Smith Senior Living, Chicago, IL, has made it a priority to build strong relationships with state representatives. For years, the life plan community's President and CEO, Kevin McGee, has invited politicians to visit the campus in order to tour the building and meet the staff and residents. In addition, McGee takes regular trips to the capital for dinners with his state representatives in order to discuss what's going on in the legislature and how that impacts his organization's ability to provide services to seniors in the area.

"I find that local politicians are very interested in what we do and how we serve the community," McGee says. "They recognize that seniors vote and they recognize there's a captive audience in a life plan community. Also, life plan communities have a good reputation in the areas we serve, so politicians are very receptive to affiliating with our organization."

Thanks to this affiliation, Smith Senior Living was able to increase its ability to serve seniors in the community. When it sought approval from the state for an expansion project that would allow it to meet the area's growing demand for rehabilitation treatment—with only 16 rehab beds, they were forced to turn away 20 to 25 referrals weekly—the politicians McGee had built a rapport with were happy to write letters of support to bolster its application. These letters, along with support from residents' family members, along with local hospitals and clergy, helped the organization move forward with its expansion, which will go a long way toward providing a much-needed service.

McGee suggests that other LeadingAge members make it a point to establish long-term relationships with their local lawmakers, so they are well-aware of the good work they do and the challenges they face. This will make it easier to get the help they need when an important issue arises.

"Establish a relationship before you need them," he says. "If they know you, have a comfort level with you, and appreciate how the organization serves the community, I think they would be much more willing to step up to support whatever project you have given the established relationship."