

Sudden cardiac arrest and the importance of quick action and access to AEDs remains in the spotlight following football player Damar Hamlin's sudden cardiac arrest earlier this year. Not only has [bipartisan legislation been introduced in Congress](#) that would help address sudden cardiac arrest in athletes by creating a federal grant program for elementary and secondary schools to purchase, maintain and provide training for AEDs, but many state legislatures, including Maryland, are tackling the issue as well. I asked our Maryland Chapter Leadership, Garima Sharma, MD, FACC, and Sammy Zakaria, MD, FACC, along with the ACC State Advocacy Team led by Michael Lawrence to share their perspectives and tips as part of this week's BOG Update. In case you missed it, you can also find a list of ACC clinician and patient resources related to sudden cardiac arrest, [here](#). It will also be a topic of discussion at the upcoming [Care of the Athletic Heart conference](#) taking place June 8-10 at Heart House in Washington, DC, and virtually. There's still time register.

Drs. Sharma and Zakaria: How did you become involved in AED advocacy and what key steps did you take to see these bills successfully pass?

In Maryland, increasing AED access has become more of a priority after a personal tragedy experienced by a Maryland legislator's chief of staff, Carol McDermott. Her husband had a cardiac arrest just outside a restaurant in Annapolis in 2014. Unfortunately, he died because no AED was available until EMS arrived. In the subsequent years, Carol used her political connections to help support a bill in the Maryland General Assembly in 2016 to require restaurants above a certain size to maintain an AED. This bill was opposed by the restaurant lobby as an unfunded mandate. The bill was referred to a workgroup that analyzed out-of-hospital cardiac arrests in the state and determined that this mandate would be relatively low yield in terms of preventing sudden cardiac death. By this point, the ACC Maryland Chapter became aware of this issue and felt that our members prioritized greater access to AEDs. Our leadership and members mobilized to testify at state committee meetings in favor of this bill in the subsequent years. With every legislative session, there is greater success, including passing at the committee level, and then at the Senate level. But there will always be roadblocks, such as a key House legislator not considering the bill at the committee level, or other legislators holding up the bill and running out the clock for the legislative session.

This legislative year, our total efforts testifying for this bill, sending multiple letters to chairs of committees, and gathering sponsors, and advocating for this in-person and online made a huge difference! Our cause also received national attention with Damar Hamlin's televised cardiac arrest on the football field. For all these reasons, the stars aligned and on the last night of the legislative session the bill overwhelmingly passed with bipartisan support (House 112-23, Senate 46-1) (along with a related companion bill that offered a \$500 tax credit).

ACC State Advocacy: How can ACC State advocacy assist state chapters to advocate for AEDs?

AED related bills have been trending in the states this legislative session. Much of this is in response to the cardiac arrest suffered by Damar Hamlin, minutes into the start of Monday Night Football. However, ACC and ACC Chapters have been engaging state lawmakers on issues related to AEDs/Sudden Cardiac Arrests (SCA) for a long time. AED legislation has traditionally focused on defibrillator placement, whether that be in schools, fitness centers, government buildings or other areas of concern. This year we are seeing additional focus on instituting cardiac emergency response plans (CERPS) as well as increased requirements for training, funding, and maintenance of AEDs. Our team has a lot of institutional knowledge on how these issues have been legislated over the years and we can provide chapters with a breakdown of where their state stands. Currently, we are tracking over 100+ AED/SCA related bills across the country. Although many states are starting to go out of session, it's not too late to get involved in these efforts or plan for future engagement.

Drs. Sharma and Zakaria and ACC State Advocacy: For those trying to build state advocacy, do you all have any advocacy pearls you can share?

Maintaining a presence in your state capital and developing relationships with state lawmakers is critical to advocacy success. If cardiovascular professionals do not communicate their concerns to lawmakers, other groups are happy to do so. When ACC members take time to advocate on behalf of their profession and patients, lawmakers are more responsive to our concerns. While it's important to work closely with allies like state medical societies and the American Heart Association, it's equally important to build ACC's brand as the voice of cardiovascular patient care in the states. Some chapters have built a sustained culture of state advocacy and others are just getting started. If you have not already done so, I would encourage state chapter leaders to contact ACC State Government Affairs (mlawrence@acc.org) to learn about all the ways they can get involved. The team has a lot of tools and expertise that can help chapters build a sustainable state advocacy program.

Other tips:

- Talk to your members about issues that they care about - align your state advocacy positions accordingly.
- If a member brings an issue to you, consider how to turn it into an advocacy opportunity.
- Work on state advocacy at least once a year, on your own and/or in partnerships with your state medical society, the AHA or other local organizations.
- Make sure that you have a Chapter representative at your state medical society legislative meetings.
- Be persistent! Expect to encounter unexpected roadblocks for all initiatives/bills. Do not get discouraged or burn bridges. Some legislators or lobbyists working against you now might be your biggest advocate later.
- Do not underestimate the importance of your professional background! Legislators appreciate your thoughts. They listen much more than you think, especially if they encounter multiple physicians, nurses, APPs, and other health-related professionals (and patients) advocating for an issue. Legislators also care that your state chapter represents hundreds (or thousands) of cardiovascular care professionals.
- Do not be cynical. Most of the issues that we care about are not partisan issues. Build allies and relationships across the political spectrum.
- Time spent on advocacy is important! Yes, it takes time away from your patients or families, but it is important in advocating for your patients and helping to frame the discussion.
- Think about donating to [ACC's HeartPAC](#). You can be sure that other types of professionals are donating at high rates to their PACs. It matters.

Have a great weekend!

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