

House Democratic Policy Committee Public Hearing

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Eight PADA members and a medical director testified at a House Democratic Policy Committee public hearing about insurance reimbursement for medical nutrition therapy on Monday, April 9 from 2-4 p.m. in the Main Capitol Building, Harrisburg. Everyone attending received a packet containing 21 written testimonies authored by the testifiers and twelve other PADA members.

How did the hearing come about? On March 2, LVDA's "Legislative Road Trip", stopped at the Bethlehem office of State Rep. Brennan, D-133. Rep. Brennan found private practitioner Gale Maleskey's story about barriers to insurance reimbursement to be so compelling that he asked the House Democratic Policy Committee to hold a public hearing the issue. The Caucus invited members of the insurance industry but they declined to appear.

Both political parties have House Policy Committees:

Democrat <http://www.pahouse.com/PolicyCommittee/index.asp#Members>

Republican <http://www.pagoppolicy.com/DevelopmentTeams.aspx> They hold “public hearings and meetings across the state and serves as the catalyst to enacting major policy initiatives put forth by members of the Caucus.” In this case, the House Democratic Policy Committee, State Rep. Mike Sturla, D-Lancaster, a long-time supporter of registered dietitians, was chosen by the caucus to lead this committee. So, House Democrats received invitations to our public hearing from their caucus; Republicans did not. However, they were welcome to join the audience. So, Rachel Kingley, Olivia Fieo, Ilona Garrity, the testifiers and many PADA members contacted key Republicans and Democrats, almost one third of the 203 House members of both parties to let them know that the subject of the hearing was important to RDs. For the Republicans and many Democrats, we emailed information about the hearing to the district office or office at the Main Capitol.

We appreciated Colleen McCann, our former lobbyist, sharing her expertise as she guided us through this process. When we met over lunch, she told us what to expect. The public hearing went very well. At 2 pm, PADA President Deb Hutcheson, PADA Reimbursement Chair Ilona Garrity, Dr. Kintzel and Nancy Wagner, LVDA Public Policy Chair, read their written testimonies. Then, five RDs testified: LVDA members: Gale Maleskey and Jacqui Jarrett; CPDA member: Carol Spicher; and, Pittsburgh DA members: Julianne Hagan and Cindy Burke.

Both panels answered questions posed by the members of the House Democratic Policy Committee. Here is a list of the members of the Democratic Caucus that attended the hearing on Monday appearing within the areas of the district dietetic associations.

LVDA

Joseph Brennan, 133-D, Northampton (oversaw the proceedings)

Tom Caltagirone, 127-D, Berks

Dante Santoni, 126-D, Berks

Phila.DA

Mike O'Brien, 175-D, Philadelphia, Democratic Vice Chair of the House Appropriations Committee.

Ron Waters, 191-D, Delaware, Philadelphia, Member, Appropriations and Health Committees

CPDA

Scott Conklin, 77-D, Centre, Member, Appropriations Committee

Pitt.DA

Dom Costa, 21-D, Allegheny

Ted Harhai, 58-D, Fayette, Westmoreland

NWDA

Chris Sainato, 9-D, Lawrence

Mark Longietti, 7-D, Mercer

NEDA/LVDA

Rosemary Brown, R, 189, Monroe, Pike

Her Legislative Aide (LA) was in the audience. Louisa Dombloski, NEDA's public policy chair, called the legislator that morning. A staff member from Rep. Scavello's office was probably there due to LVDA member Marty Davey and other LVDA members contacting the district office. Rep. Scavello is part of the Appropriations Committee as the Subcommittee Chair on Education. He is also a member of the Professional Licensure Committee. There was an official from the PA Department of Health in the audience.

After the hearing, many PADA members/constituents of these state representatives called their offices to thank them for attending.

The House Democratic Policy Committee members in attendance were receptive and responsive. Representative Mike O'Brien said, "This was not on our radar and I am glad that we know about this before we start on the budget process [in June]." Representative Waters asked what other states have done. Representative Brennan and others told us about a bill that Rep. Gene DiGirolamo, 18-R, Bucks, was writing as Chair of the Health Services Committee. We are finding out more about this bill and also about those of other states. Rep. Waters wondered what other states were doing.

The afternoon concluded with Representative Brennan asking members in attendance if they would co-sponsor forthcoming legislation that would rectify the complex and unacceptable situation about which PADA members testified.