

Policy and Statement on Representation and Advocacy
Adopted by the Alabama Hospital Association Board of Trustees
September 18, 1997

Policy: The Alabama Hospital Association (AlaHA) serves both as representative and advocate for its members. On issues where there is a clear consensus, the Association represents and advocates the position of its members. In situations, when there is clear evidence that incompatible positions are held within the membership, the Board of Trustees may identify an issue as “Representation Only.”

Statement of Rationale: The Board recognized that representation and advocacy are closely aligned, yet separate functions, and should be combined when possible. It is crucial to identify specific elements of each issue and seek consensus on those elements. Where there is agreement, the organization can effectively advocate. At the same time, it may be necessary to represent the various differences when members are unable to agree. In some cases, the Board may agree that there will be no advocacy, only representation. When an issue is determined “Representation Only,” certain procedural steps will be followed (see below.)

To represent and advocate on behalf of its members is the lifeblood of a strong association and is inherent in the mission of AlaHA. In fact, history supports that the great majority of issues will call for AlaHA to both represent and advocate on behalf of its members. Realistically, limiting the AlaHA role to “Representation Only” only for a specific issue or its elements should rarely be necessary.

The temptation for voluntary associations is to back away from an issue that divides its membership and to move ahead in supporting those issues that have a solid majority. Without strong consensus, the Association may be tempted to steer away from important public policy debates. When an association removes itself from important debates or advocates one side of a polarized or pluralized issue, it erodes credibility with government, members and the public.

Procedural Steps:

- AlaHA, through its leadership and staff, serve as the spokesperson for the membership.
- One of the key functions of the association is to provide a forum for its members to discuss policy issues among members who often have diverse interests.
- If, after efforts to achieve consensus, significant differences of opinion among portions of the membership continue, AlaHA will “Represent” its members’ diverse opinions.
- The AlaHA Board’s decision to “Represent Only” on specific issues should rarely be employed and then employed only after every effort to manage the conflict and reach consensus has been exhausted.
- The AlaHA membership and staff should know that no negative stigma should be attached to a decision to limit efforts to “Representation Only.”
- A decision to focus AlaHA’s efforts on representation on a major issue does not limit advocacy on sub-issues where consensus exists, or from providing guidance and information describing the “least harm” aspects of any sub-issue changes in the program or process.

