

Become legislatively savvy in just 8 easy steps!

# Mississippi Politics 101

The Dental Edition



From basic facts about the state legislature  
to issues facing Mississippi dentists.

MDPAC  
Mississippi Dental  
Political Action Committee

Protecting your patients, practice, and profession

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Step 1 — The Mississippi Legislature.....</b>	<b>03</b>
How does the legislative process work?	
How does a bill become a law?	
<b>Step 2— Mississippi Dental Leadership.....</b>	<b>06</b>
MDA	
MDA Goals	
MDA Staff	
<b>Step 3 — Voting Power.....</b>	<b>09</b>
Why should you vote?	
How do you register to vote?	
Where do you go to vote?	
Who should you vote for?	
<b>Step 4 — Grassroots Advocacy.....</b>	<b>11</b>
How do I know who represents me?	
How do I develop a relationship with my legislator?	
What is a key contact dentist?	
What are the State House and Senate districts?	
How do I stay informed on issues that are affecting dentistry?	
What is a lobbyist and what do they do for us?	
<b>Step 5 — Political Action.....</b>	<b>16</b>
What is MDPAC?	
Why do we need MDPAC?	
What does MDPAC do?	
How can I participate in political action?	
Where do my MDPAC dollars go?	
<b>Step 6 — Dental Issues in Mississippi.....</b>	<b>21</b>
How many dental issues could possibly be decided by state officials?	
What are the legislative issues facing Mississippi dentists?	
<b>Step 7 — State Law vs. State Board.....</b>	<b>24</b>
What is the difference between state law and the state board rules?	
<b>Step 8 — Now You're Ready!.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>26</b>

# Step One

---

The Mississippi Legislature

---

# Step One- The Mississippi Legislature

---

In order to understand Mississippi Politics, we will have to start with the basics. In

*Step One* we will review the legislative process and the roles of the Mississippi Senate and House of Representatives.

## How does the legislative process work?

The Mississippi Legislature is a bicameral system composed of the lower **Mississippi House of Representatives**, with **122** members, and the upper **Mississippi Senate**, with **52** members. Both Representatives and Senators serve **four-year terms** without term limits.

The Mississippi Legislature convenes at the Mississippi State Capitol in Jackson every year. The legislature meets for 125 days during the first year of the four year term. They meet 90 days in all other years.

## Mississippi Senate

The Senate is composed of 52 members.

The Senators are elected to a term of 4 years.

The Lieutenant Governor, elected state wide by the voters, presides over the Senate.

The Lieutenant Governor appoints all Senate committee chairs and members and assigns all bills to committees.

Senate confirmation is required for all state officials appointed by the Governor.

## Mississippi House

The House is composed of 122 members.

The representatives are elected to a term of 4 years.

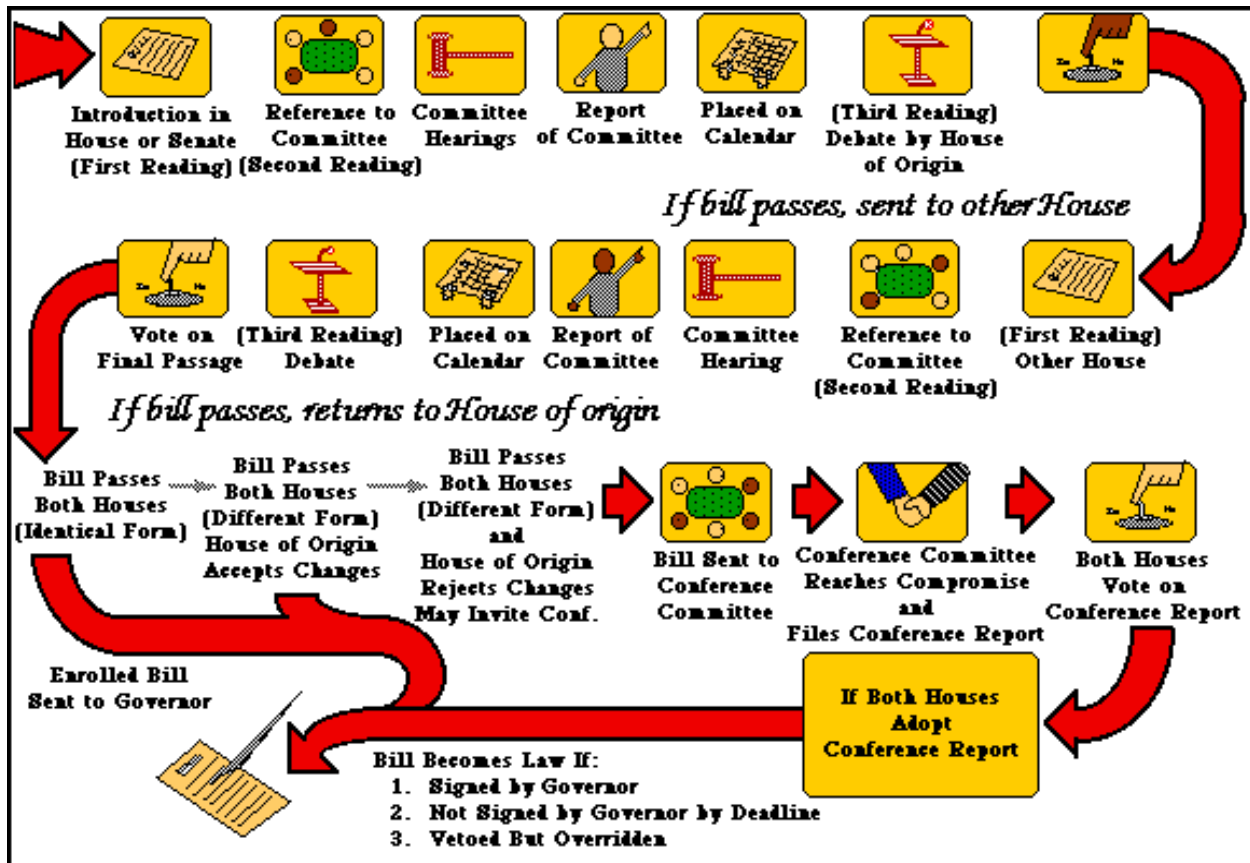
The Speaker of the House, elected by a majority vote of the House members, presides over the House of Representatives.

The Speaker appoints all House committee chairs and members and assigns all bills to committees.

## How does a bill become a law?

A law begins as a bill. A representative or senator gets an idea for a bill by listening to the people he or she represents and then working to solve their problem. The idea is researched to determine what state law needs to be changed or created to best solve that problem. Once a bill has been written, it is introduced by a member of the House or Senate in the member's own chamber with the exception of

# How a Bill Becomes a Law



## FUN FACT:

The House has the duty under the Mississippi Constitution to select the Governor of Mississippi if no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote. This has occurred only one time, in 1999 when Ronnie Musgrove was selected (Musgrove had the most votes statewide, but fell a fraction of a point shy of a majority).



# Step Two

---

Mississippi Dental Leadership

---

## **Step Two- Mississippi Dental Leadership**

---

Three components are needed in order to build a successful government affairs program:  
***Professional Leadership, Political Action, and a Grassroots Network***

### **Professional Leadership**

#### **Mississippi Dental Association**

- Founded in 1875
- About 80% of all dentists in Mississippi are members of the MDA
- The MDA is member-driven and governed by dentists through an elected Board of Trustees and various other councils and committees.

#### **MDA GOALS:**

- Providing value for our dentist members by communicating relevant information on current dentistry issues.

Representing and protecting the interests of dentists before state policymakers.

#### **MDA STAFF:**

- The MDA has three full time staff members: Executive Director, Member Relations Director, and Communications Director.
- The MDA employs a professional lobbying team (Thompson & Associates)



**mississippi**  
DENTAL ASSOCIATION

**MDA Officers:**

Dr. Paula Stewart	President
Dr. Jimmy Hollingsworth	President-elect
Dr. Andrea Elenbaas	1st Vice President
Dr. Mark Williams	2nd Vice President
Dr. Delton Moore	Past President
Dr. Joe Burns	Secretary / Treasurer
Dr. Don Doty	Speaker
Dr. Pia Kirk	Editor

***The MDA is governed by a Board of Trustees that includes our Elected Officers (listed above), two Trustees from district, our three elected ADA Delegates, the Dean of UMMC SOD and the Executive Director.***

**MDA Staff Members:**

Connie Lane	Executive Director
Tamra Shepherd	Member Services Director
Annie Tolbert	Communications Director

**Lobby Team:**

Thompson and Associates—Clifford Thompson, Jim Thompson and Ted Thompson



# Step Three

---

Voting Power

---

## Step Three – Voting Power

Here we are at *Step Three*. Now we will discuss the importance of voting and the power of one vote, particularly in state and local elections. We will also find out how to register to vote, where to go to vote, and other important voting information.

### Why should you vote?

It's simple – when you do not vote, you let others speak for you. When you do not vote, by default you cast your vote against the person or proposal you would prefer. The power of a single vote is staggering. When you do not vote, that vote is one less the opposition has to overcome, thus your “no vote” is a vote for them. It is our right to stand up and be counted. And the way we do that is by casting our ballot.

In 1923, **just one vote** resulted in Adolf Hitler gaining leadership in the German Nazi Party.

### How do you register to vote?

You may register to vote either by mail or by visiting your county Circuit Clerk (usually in the county courthouse) or Municipal Clerk (usually in City Hall). You also may register to vote when applying for or renewing your driver's license, or when applying for services at numerous state and federal government agencies. Any Mississippian qualified to register to vote may do so by mail. For an application, call your county Circuit Clerk, or pick one up at the courthouse, public library or other participating government office. Mail-in voter registration forms are also available from the Secretary of State's Office at [www.sos.ms.gov](http://www.sos.ms.gov).

### Where do you go to vote?

Polling places are usually listed in your local newspapers in the weeks before the election. Call your county clerk, county elections administrator, or political subdivision conducting the election in order to find your polling location. You can also check online with the Secretary of State's Office at: <http://cfl.sos.state.ms.us/webpages/searchpolling.aspx>

### Who should you vote for?

As an American, we have the right to vote, but as individuals it is our responsibility to research the candidates and where they stand on important issues before hitting the voting booth. Every election is important for your profession, family, and community. So do your homework so you can make an informed decision!

### Mississippi Secretary of State

[www.sos.ms.gov](http://www.sos.ms.gov)

### DID YOU KNOW:

- At one time, only white males owning property could vote.
- The voting age was 21 and only lowered to 18 in 1971.

# Step Four

---

Grassroots Advocacy

---

## Step Four - Grassroots Advocacy

---

*Step Four* will take you through finding out who represents you, how to develop relationships with your legislators, and how to become more involved with grassroots advocacy efforts in your community.

Cultivating a grassroots presence for dentistry in every legislative district is key. The more involved you are at home with your local politicians and their campaigns, the more influence dentistry gains at the legislative level.

### **How do I know who represents me?**

You can find out who represents you by visiting the MS State Legislature website at <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/>.

### **How do I develop a relationship with my legislator?**

Most elected officials want to know as many of their constituents as possible. You can develop a relationship with your legislator by volunteering for their political campaign, hosting a private fundraiser in your home or office, or inviting them as a special guest to public functions such as dental society meetings, building dedications, groundbreakings, and charity events.

Once you have developed a relationship with your legislator, contact the Mississippi Dental Association and establish yourself as a key contact dentist.

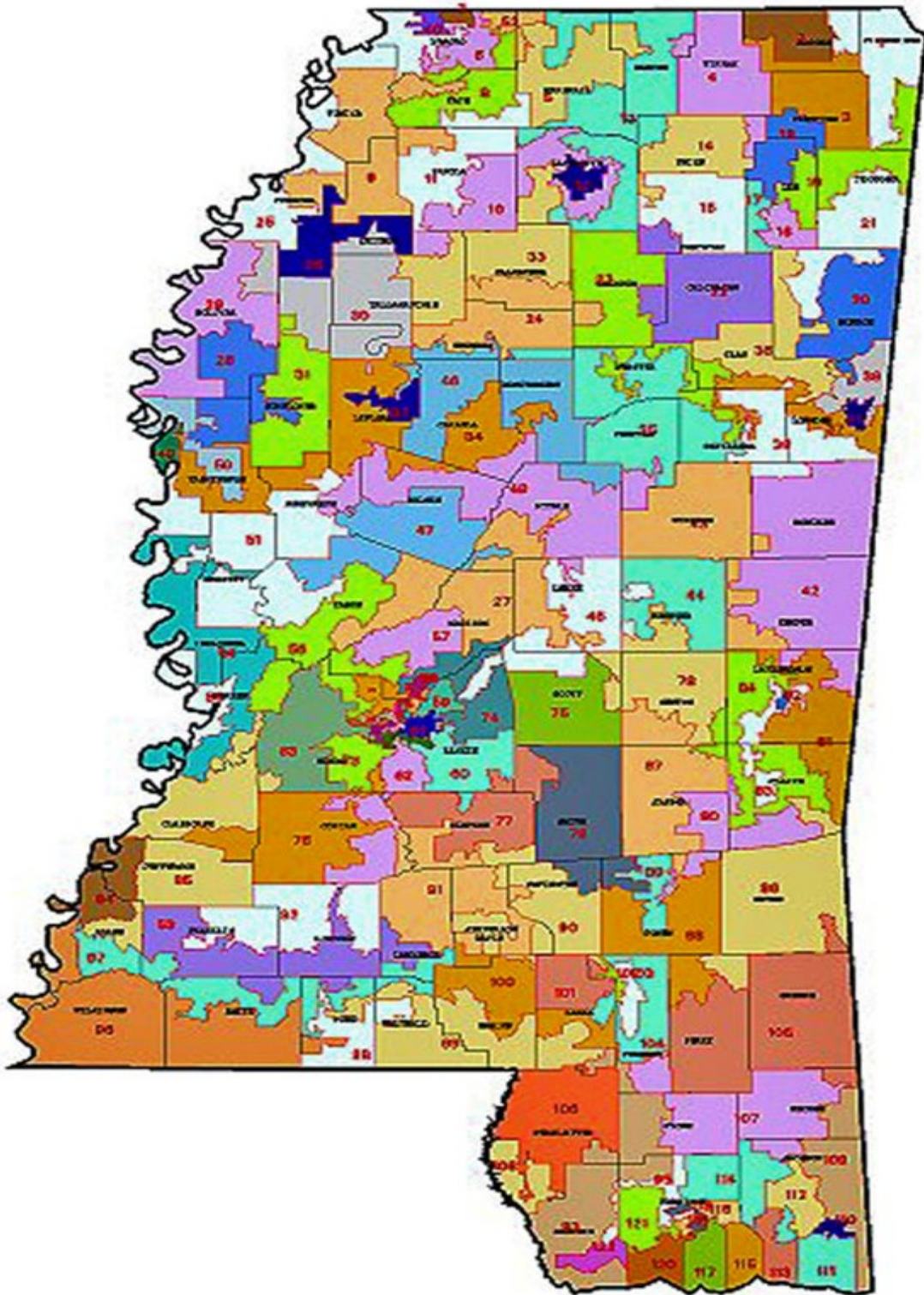
### **What is a key contact dentist?**

A key contact dentist is an individual who is committed to the advancement of MDA issues and who serves as a liaison to one or more elected or appointed policymakers.

The Mississippi Dental Association needs you to serve as a key contact to Mississippi's state officials. Do you know the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, a legislator and/or a state official? If so, let us know and, if not, let us help you build a relationship with the legislators in your district!

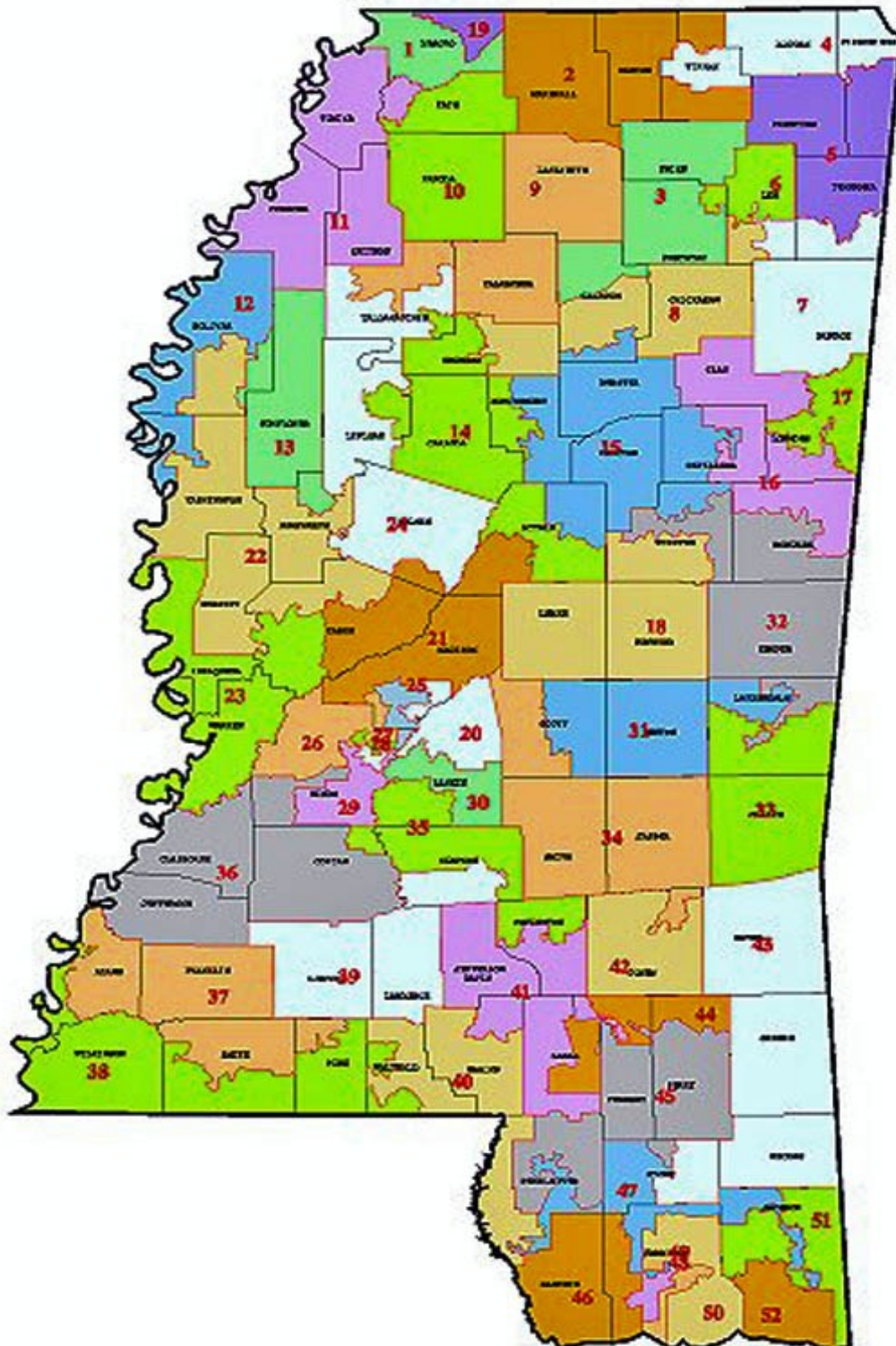
In an effort to increase the MDA's contact database and to build our strength at the grassroots level, we would like you to complete a form for those elected/appointed officials whom you could serve as a key contact. You can obtain a form by calling the MDA central office at (601) 982-0442 or submit your form online by visiting [www.ms dental.org/advocacy/mda-grassroots-network](http://www.ms dental.org/advocacy/mda-grassroots-network). A strong grassroots organization will help to ensure a voice in government for the dental profession.

## Mississippi State House of Representatives Districts Map





## Mississippi State Senate Districts Map



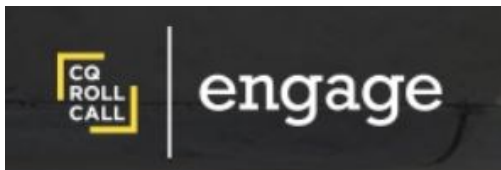
## How do I stay informed on issues that are affecting dentistry?

The Mississippi Dental Association is the driving force behind keeping Mississippi dentists informed on issues affecting dentistry. You can stay up to date by reading all messaging sent from the MDA central office. You may also visit **our MDA advocacy website, Engage** — <http://www.cqrcengage.com/mississippidental/home> .

For additional information, you can contact the MDA by phone at (601) 664-9691 or by e-mail at [office@msdental.org](mailto:office@msdental.org).

## What is a lobbyist and what do they do for us?

A lobbyist is someone who works for a special interest group and who builds relationships with legislators and tries to persuade legislators to vote for bills that are favored by that group against bills not favored, and amend bills which affect dental patients and dentists. The Mississippi Dental Association has a lobby team of outside legislative consultants who report to the MDA President, MDA Executive Director and the Chair of the MDA Council on Governmental Affairs. This team lobbies for dental issues during the legislative session and presents legislative candidate evaluations to determine campaign contributions during the campaign season. These individuals are an essential part of the MDA legislative team.



# Step Five

---

Political Action

---



## Step Five – Political Action

Just what is a political action committee? In *Step Five* we will tackle that question as well as what political action committees do, why we need them and how they help protect the profession of dentistry in Mississippi.

A **POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE (PAC)** is an organization formed by business, labor, or other special-interest groups to raise money and make contributions to the campaigns of political candidates it supports.

PACs allow individuals who support the same issues to combine their financial support to candidates into a significant single donation.

### What is MDPAC?

- MDPAC, the Mississippi Dental Political Action Committee is the political arm of the Mississippi Dental Association that represents the interests of dentists.
- We are a voluntary, non-profit, unincorporated, federally registered committee of individual dentists that present a strong, united voice at the Mississippi Legislature on behalf of Mississippi dentists.
- We are the **ONLY** political action committee in Mississippi that represents dentists.
- We are not affiliated with any political party.
- MDPAC is affiliated with ADPAC, the American Dental Political Action Committee, in order to ensure that Mississippi dentists' interests are also represented in Congress.

### Why do we need MDPAC and why is it important to Mississippi dentists?

- State government plays a vital role in setting guidelines for how you run your practice on a daily basis and how your dental patients receive care. From taxation and regulation to scope of practice and licensing, the Mississippi Legislature makes decisions affecting every aspect of the dental profession and our patients.
- MDPAC helps individual dentists gain equal leverage on the political playing field with big dollar contributors, such as insurance companies and trial lawyers.
- MDPAC works to prevent unnecessary government intervention and to maintain the sanctity of the dentist-patient relationship.
- MDPAC allows dentists to pool their individual contributions together in order to make substantial contributions to the campaigns of key pro-dentistry legislators who are in a position to influence the issues that affect dental patients and practices.
- MDPAC campaign contributions provide an excellent opportunity to establish relationships with legislators.
- MDPAC exists to advocate for the positions of the MDA on all types of legislation and to ensure that the Mississippi Dental Association is a constant presence at our state capitol.

***One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.***

**Plato (also the favorite quote of our MDA Lobbyist, Clifford Thompson)**

### **What does MDPAC do?**

We strive for the improvement of government by encouraging and stimulating dentists and others to take a more active and effective part in governmental affairs. We encourage dentists and others to understand the nature and actions of their government. Along with the practice of dentistry, MDPAC promotes and protects the dental health of the people of Mississippi. We assist dentists and others in organizing themselves for more effective political action and in carrying out their civic responsibilities.

### **How can I participate in political action?**

You can participate in political action by attending the MDA “Oral Health Day at the State Capitol”, becoming a key contact dentist, getting involved as a local MDPAC representative, or simply by contributing to MDPAC.

You can contribute to the PAC in many different ways and at many different levels. You can give through your MDA membership dues statement, online at [www.msdenal.org](http://www.msdenal.org), or by phone at (601) 664-9691.



*“MDPAC empowers our members to help shape the political environment in order to protect the integrity of our dental profession and our patients. We successfully supported several bills in the most recent legislative session. The MDPAC helps our organization have a stronger voice in the political process and also makes our voices heard. MDPAC contributions help elect candidates who in turn define public policies that support our profession. MDPAC needs your help. Now more than ever we must increase our presence in the political arena. We must elevate our support as well as encourage our colleagues to get involved. If we want to preserve the way we practice dentistry, then we must help guide our political leaders in matters that impact our profession and the patients we serve. Help us generate continuous contact and meaningful relationships with our legislators. Help us make our voice heard. We must support MDPAC!”*

**Dr. Drew Middleton**  
**MDPAC Chairman**

## **Advocacy**

---

### **WHEN MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS**

#### ***DO....***

- Let the legislator know you are a constituent (a voter in his/her district).
- Let the legislators know you are involved in the MDA.
- Establish a common bond (does not have to be political).
- Talk briefly about MDA legislative priorities.
- Ask the legislator if he/she has any questions about your line of work or oral health.
- Let the legislator know that you are happy to help any time they need information or have questions about your profession and let them know how to contact you in the future.
- Close the sale—ask the legislator for his or her support, e.g., Do you believe you can support our position on this issue?
- If the legislator does commit to MDA position, thank them for their support.
- Always close by thanking the legislator for their time and service.

#### ***DO NOT....***

- Discuss any legislation not included on the MDA's legislative agenda and especially not related to dentistry.
- Pledge any funds or future support (if asked, respond that you will be happy to take the request to the MDPAC leadership).
- Imply that MDA support of the legislator is contingent upon his/her support of MDA issues.
- Criticize any state agency.

#### ***TIPS....***

- Your elected officials are no different than you. They cannot be experts on everything that they are asked to vote on. In making decisions, they utilize their experiences and background and education they receive from advocacy groups and other interested parties.
- The vast majority of legislators have no idea as to what goes on in your workplace. They need to be educated by you in order to make good decisions, irrespective of the elected official's political leanings.
- There are at least two sides to every issue. For every issue you are concerned about, there is an opposing view. If you are not doing your part to educate your state senator and state representative to your concerns, then you are ceding power to those who are taking the time to educate their elected officials. You cannot rely solely upon lobbyists to deliver your message.
- There are time constraints in dealing with legislators. You have generally 5-10 minutes to get your message across and will probably reach a point of saturation at 30 minutes.
- Motivate those who you serve to take action on your behalf. Who knows your workplace better than you? Tell the legislator how many people you represent (e.g., I am here on behalf of the X number of MDA members/patients/oral health professionals in your district who are concerned about.....)

## SUGGESTED MDPAC MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

★ Student Membership	\$10.00
★ Recent Graduate	\$35.00
★ Active Membership	\$50.00 - \$174.00
★ Century Membership	\$175.00 - \$499.00
★ Crown Membership	\$500.00
★ Diamond Membership	\$750.00
★ Platinum Membership	\$1,000.00

### Where do my MDPAC dollars go?

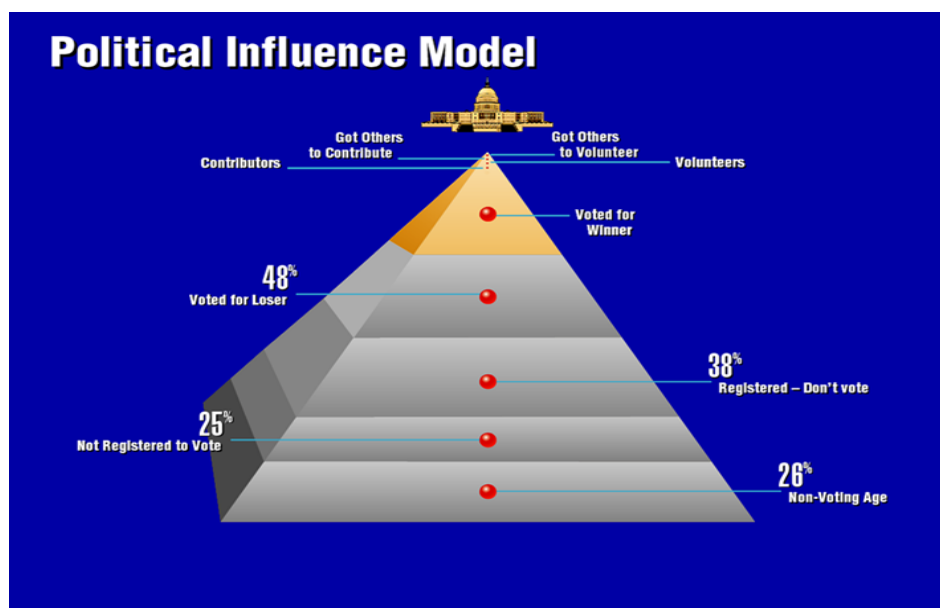
One hundred percent of your MDPAC dollars go to candidates seeking state office. It is essential that we help elect responsive candidates who understand the important role dental health plays in our communities. Working together we can protect our patients and ensure that dentistry is practiced the way we know it should be.

### IMPORTANT MDPAC MONEY FACTS

- \* MDA dues dollars cannot go toward funding MDPAC.
- \* MDPAC is solely funded from contributions from individual MDA members and dental students.
- \* Elected officials cannot use contributions from MDPAC for personal reasons.
- \* Only personal contributions or contributions from partnerships or LLCs which elect taxation at the individual rate may be used to support pro-dentistry candidates for office. Corporate contributions cannot be used to directly support candidates and have

This pyramid represents the average Congressional District of 700,000 people.

This model can apply to lawmakers at the federal, state and local level.



# Step Six

---

Dental Issues

---

## Step Six – Dental Issues

---

Now that you know how the legislative process works, the power of voting, and the importance of political action, you probably want to know how it all applies to the dental profession. In *Step six* we will review the role the state legislature plays in your practice and what legislative issues face Mississippi dentists.

### **How many dental related issues could possibly be decided by state officials?**

Every legislative session hundreds of bills contain the words dental, oral health, or other terms relating to the practice of dentistry. The Mississippi Legislature decides everything from license renewal fees and continuing education hours to Medicaid reimbursement rates and taxation. Ninety percent of everything related to the practice of dentistry in the state of Mississippi is governed by the Mississippi Legislature.

### **What are the legislative issues facing Mississippi dentists?**

Issues facing Mississippi dentists vary from session to session. However there are a few we can expect to arise every or most legislative years. These include:

#### **1) Taxation on Dental Practices or Services**

MDA continues to oppose any tax, such as a sales tax on dental services, which would increase the cost of dental care and discourage access. If state fees are increased, the increase should be spread equally across all professions.

MDA agrees that the dental profession benefits from a well-educated workforce and patient population, and supports a strong public education system. At the same time, the impact of business taxation on dental practices must be minimal and not interrupt access to care.

#### **2) Dental Insurance – Preferred Provider Organizations**

Thanks to MDA's advocacy, Mississippi has a unique law requiring state-regulated dental plans to pay both network and non-network dentists at the same rate. That is what we call "Freedom of Choice" in our state.

MDA will continually monitors potential changes to the insurance legislation and advocates for fair business practices.

#### **3) Unsupervised Practice for Dental Hygienists and Denturism**

MDA has successfully opposed and continues to work against legislation that allows dental team members to practice without supervision in certain settings prior to the patient being examined by a dentist. Also, the MDA has been successful in preventing the legalization of denturism in our state.

## **Government Programs—Medicaid, CHIP and MississippiCAN**

For many years MDA has advocated fair reimbursement levels in Medicaid and CHIP. Low reimbursement rates and administrative hassles discourage many Mississippi dentists from participating in these programs.

That is why the MDA continually lobbies to improve different aspects of these programs, to help dentists serve as providers and to meet the need of those who are eligible and in need of oral health care.

---

### **FINAL IMPORTANT ADVOCACY TAKE AWAYS**

- 1) **Legislators have no clue about your profession of dentistry.**
- 2) **When talking with them, keep your message simple and on point.**
- 3) **Learn to deal with time constraints—just like in your office or clinic.**
- 4) **Ask for a commitment.**
- 5) **If a legislator commits—stop talking!**
- 6) **Be will to be an advocate for your profession. You worked hard to become a dentist. Do not expect others to always carry the banner to protect and make improvements on behalf of your profession.**



# Step Seven

---

State Law vs. State Board

---



## Step Seven – State Law vs. State Board

---

Regulation of the dental professional can often be confusing. With all the laws governing dentistry being controlled by multiple bodies such as the state legislature and state dental board, how do you make the distinction? In *Step Seven* we will set the record straight on just who does what!

### **What is the difference between state law and state board rules?**

Under Mississippi law, the Mississippi State Board of Dental Examiners ("the Board") is a legislatively-mandated state regulatory agency charged with the responsibilities of examining, licensing, registering, and regulating the practices of dentistry and dental hygiene to ensure competency (through examination and licensure) and ethics (through registration and regulation) among all dental professionals in the State of Mississippi for the ultimate goal of safeguarding and enhancing the health and welfare of the citizens of this State. As such, the Board is neither affiliated with nor functions as a subsidiary of any private or professional organization.

Under the Mississippi Constitution, only the state legislature can enact laws such as the Dental Practice Act (DPA). The DPA specifically addresses a wide variety of issues related to the practice of dentistry. For example, it authorizes the MSBDE to enforce state law and MSBDE rules, as well as investigate and punish violators.

In addition to authorizing the MSBDE to enforce state law relating to dentistry, the DPA permits the MSBDE to make binding rules without legislative approval. Since the MSBDE Board meets several times each year, the ability to make rules enables the MSBDE to move quickly to address any issues or problems that may arise. Finally, since the majority of the MSBDE Board members are dentists, they have the detailed knowledge needed to address issues related to their profession.



<https://www.dentalboard.ms.gov/>

## **STATE LEGISLATURE**

The Mississippi Legislature passes all laws governing the state, The Dental Practice Act.



## **DENTAL PRACTICE ACT**

The Dental Practice Act (DPA) specifically addresses issues related to the practice of dentistry in Mississippi.



## **MISSISSIPPI STATE BOARD OF DENTAL EXAMINERS**

The Mississippi State Board of Dental Examiners (MSBDE) is authorized by the Dental Practice Act to regulate and enforce state law relating to the practice of dentistry in Mississippi.



## **STATE BOARD RULES**

The State Board Rules are created by the Mississippi State Board of Dental Examiners to help regulate the practice of dentistry in Mississippi.

# Step Eight

---

## You Are Ready—Now Get Involved

- The future of dentistry lies in the hands of those who care the most—YOU the dentist! Your continued professional leadership is key to the ongoing success of dentistry as you transition into the professional world!
- The MDA will serve as your collaborative state professional voice in the Mississippi political arena as it relates to dentistry. The ADA will serve as your collaborative national voice on issues that impact dentistry in Washington, DC. It is always our goal to serve and protect the interests of our dentist members. But you must also remember that YOU are the MDA and the ADA! Without your involvement and support, we cannot advocate collectively and successfully for you.
- You have decided to be part of a valued health care profession that is important to everyone. Do all that you can to promote and protect your profession in the years ahead.

### REFERENCES

Mississippi Legislature Online

<http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/>

Mississippi Secretary of State

[www.sos.ms.gov](http://www.sos.ms.gov)

Mississippi State Board of Dental Examiners

[www.dentalboard.ms.gov](http://www.dentalboard.ms.gov)



# NOTES