

GUEST COLUMN: The Important Role of Trustee Advocacy

An AHA interview of Damond Boatwright, President and CEO, Hospital Sisters Health System



Damond Boatwright

The following excerpt was published in the June issue of the American Hospital Association's (AHA) Trustee Insights. They interviewed four executive leaders from hospitals and health systems around the country to learn what is on their advocacy agenda, as well as some of the secrets to their success in collaborating with trustees to ensure their organizations can deliver high-quality care to their communities. Hospital Sisters Health System President & CEO and former WHA Board Chair Damond Boatwright was one of those interviewed. His comments are below.

What are your organization's top advocacy priorities for 2023?

BOATWRIGHT: We work to influence federal, state and local health care. Our advocacy priorities are in line with our mission, and our advocacy agenda is centered on acknowledging the value of life across the entire life span and the inherent dignity of all. This includes challenges such as reasonable gun control to reduce gun violence. We advocate for policies that support better public health—safe streets, affordable housing, clean water, improved literacy—essentially the social determinants of health.

I believe there needs to be an attempt to enhance the Affordable Care Act to further benefit our communities and those we serve. The ACA is not in and of itself ideal and there is much to improve. We need bipartisan support to make changes to the act that moves us toward affordable and more

accessible care. HSHS will advocate for enhancements to the ACA this year when we see the opportunities to do so.

What do you see as the trustee's role in advocacy in general and for 2023 in particular?

BOATWRIGHT: I appreciate when I as a CEO can partner with my trustees to advance any one of the issues we support. My organization's trustees have a wide variety of expertise, which can be invaluable for strengthening support and advocating in areas that they know. We cannot do this alone. Trustees bring with them a network of people they know along with resources that can impact these issues and create change. It can be in the form of phone calls, donations, writing letters, opening doors to legislators, etc. Typically, board members are well connected in the community. They can also assist in connecting us to the legislative language that will be well received and positively impactful. We only have so much information and need to use the resources available to our organization. It is important to use their connections and their voice to ensure we can successfully address important advocacy issues.

What are a few strategies that have been effective in leveraging trustees in your organization's advocacy efforts?

BOATWRIGHT: Our board members have helped us build allies who have been able to obtain support for our organization and our endeavors in certain situations. This has been valuable when we advance initiatives such as building a new hospital or consolidation/changes in services that might require both community and statewide support. This might come in the form of certificate of need support, for example.

Lobby day participation has been key for our trustees as well. This is an opportunity we leverage to advance our advocacy agenda. Our board members have been asked to testify to legislative bodies for specific issues on behalf of our organization. Personal outreach to legislative members is also of great importance. Our trustees are unpaid and are volunteers. I do think that gives them more credibility because they are viewed as less partial. Their advocacy comes from a position of commitment to the mission, not one of supporting their livelihoods.

Trustees can also be helpful when we consider potential business ventures that may benefit the organization, such as mergers or acquisitions. They can serve to support those initiatives with their experience, connections and expertise.

The two most important roles for board members are overall governance/strategy and advocacy. I believe a key board role is advocating for all that is best for the organization.

Other Articles in this Issue

- [Another Successful Wisconsin Rural Health Conference](#)
- [Speaker Robin Vos Discusses Discharge Challenges, Price Transparency](#)
- [GUEST COLUMN: The Important Role of Trustee Advocacy](#)
- [CMS Announces Flexibility in Calculating CAH 96-hour Average Length of Stay](#)
- [WHA Expresses Concerns with Inadequate Payment Update in 2024 Proposed Inpatient Rule](#)
- [Health Care Emergency Readiness Planning: HHS Child and Adolescent Health Emergency Planning Toolkit Available](#)
- [WHA Celebrates Community Health Improvement Week, Shares Resource](#)
- [Register for Health Equity Regulation Hot Topics Webinar, June 29](#)