

## ADVOCACY'S IMPACT

# Beyond Numbers

## Inside the NATA Legislative Boot Camp – its story, its growth and its future

By Lydia Hicks

**W**hat started as an effort to provide more focused legislative advocacy training for ATs has developed into a powerhouse resource producing groundbreaking laws and sustainable initiatives related to the athletic training profession, in more than 20 states.

In January 2020, *NATA News* reported on the creation of the NATA Legislative Boot Camps, launched by the NATA Government Affairs Department, for any state wanting to participate. The NATA Legislative Boot Camp, established in the fall of 2019, is a two-day, eight-hour course developed as an exclusive NATA member benefit to assist state associations with their legislative advocacy efforts. Within three years, 27 boot camps have been held to ensure state associations have the support needed to move the needle for their ATs.

“Prior to the boot camps, our interaction with states was limited to mostly group work and not focused on individual state’s needs,” NATA Director of Government Affairs Amy Callender said.

Recognizing this need for tailored advocacy birthed the boot camps.

“Having government affairs staff members who have all worked in legislative offices gives us the opportunity to share our previous experience and expertise to assist states as a member benefit,” Callender said.

Not only did the department hope to align states’ efforts with each other and NATA, “the boot camps also allow us to use experiences in other states to institute best practices across the country,” she said.

### Its Impact for Members

NATA Manager of State Government Affairs Deanna Kuykendall said that the boot camps are customized according to each state’s needs, so no two boot camps are alike. Therefore, “the success for a state might be different for another.”

“We work closely with state leadership to assist in reaching their advocacy goals,” Kuykendall said. “Our role is not to dictate what a state should or should not do, but rather assist them in navigating the legislative advocacy process, drawing from our experience and expertise as former legislative staffers. Working together, we can make a huge impact.”

Of these impact stories are three state-representing athletic trainers, whose first-hand experiences with the boot camps have helped their associations make strides in their practice act updates, law enactments and issues affecting athletic trainers around the country.

Nebraska State Athletic Trainers’ Association Governmental Affairs Committee Chair Rusty McKune, MS, ATC, said he heard about the NATA Legislative Boot Camps in October 2020 through NATA and his involvement with state, district and national governmental affairs committees. He said that he sought the boot camp’s assistance with updating Nebraska’s athletic training practice act, adding that the state had not updated its practice act since 1998. It needed to be modernized and brought up to standard for athletic trainers to practice at the top of their skill set, he said.

“[The newly established NSATA GAC] had a lot of new minds and new energy, and the NSATA executive board felt that it was the right time to pull everyone together to get us all on the same page,” McKune said. “[It was an] opportunity to not only look at where we were at two years ago when we did the boot camp and what we had ahead of us with our pending legislation, but also feel positive and

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– Oklahoma Athletic Trainers’ Association Vice President Chandra Dyer, LAT, ATC

have the confidence that act was going to progress – and, fortunately, it did.”

But the boot camp’s help went beyond that. The NSATA GAC aimed to establish strategic opportunities and foundations to ensure that after the updated practice act was passed, it had a path forward. Because of the boot camp, and gathering all necessary parties into one room, the state association was solidly positioned to “continue with the momentum, continue with the successes, continue with the relationships and really have that plan in place to take us, not only through the revision of the practice act, but to get us three, four years beyond that,” McKune said.

For Oklahoma Athletic Trainers’ Association Vice President and OATA GAC member Chandra Dyer, LAT, ATC, attending OATA’s April 2021 boot camp helped her learn more about her organization’s legislative needs and the process to meet them.

One of those pieces of legislation was the Riley Boatwright Act – named in memory of a Lexington, Oklahoma, middle school athlete who died from injuries incurred during a 2019 football game. The act would require ambulances and emergency medical services to be present at Oklahoma school districts’ athletic events and school activities.

It was signed into law in 2020 and updated in 2021 with its name changed to Riley’s Rule (House Bill 1775), by request of the family and to reflect the amendment added for clarification, Dyer said.

According to the Oklahoma House of Representatives, beginning in the 2021 school year, Riley’s Rule requires school boards to “coordinate with emergency medical providers in their area to create an emergency action plan for all athletic facilities and events, including practices.”

“The boot camp kind of opened the eyes of our board of directors and everyone to be

more active with the legislative process,” Dyer said. “[The NATA Government Affairs Department] breaks it down to the basic of, if needed, how the bills are passed and how they go through the committees and what they look for all the way through how to connect with your legislators to talk to them. It is a lot of information, but it’s great because you learn more in-depth about what your organization needs. I think it’s a great thing to go through and I think every state should do it.”

Athletic Trainers’ Association of Florida President Pattie M. Tripp, PhD, LAT, ATC, who took part in the October 2021 legislative boot camp, said that at the time of the boot camp, ATAF had had the same lobbyist since it acquired its initial license for athletic training in the mid-1990s. However, only a few ATAF leaders had developed a relationship with the lobbyist. With a new leadership team in 2021, ATAF leveraged the boot camp as a resource to “recognize the value of and opportunities to strategically cultivate the relationship between our organization and our lobbyist,” she said.

The experience also helped the association realize that not all changes to athletic training practice necessitate legislative action.

“Supported with new information and a better understanding of our regulatory framework, we leveraged our position and influence to support changes within our practice in collaboration with the board of athletic training,” Tripp said.

She said that those who are still uncertain about participating in the boot camps should consider how it tackles the ongoing issues affecting their athletic training careers.

“I would ask yourself, ‘Why are you hesitant about moving the state of your membership and the ability for your members to practice to the fullest extent of their profession and their abilities?’” Tripp said. “Why would

you prevent that from happening? I would think that if you’re not wanting to have that conversation, then it would seem that you are putting up your own barriers.”

### Its Growth and Future

Kuykendall said that “our government affairs department has been continuously generating advocacy resources but the feedback we began receiving from many of the state leaders was that they wanted a more hands-on approach as to how to utilize those resources. Hence, we created these boot camps.”

The next stage, which began late October 2022, is Legislative Boot Camp 2.0. It entails revisiting previous groups and building upon their successes or applying what was learned at a higher level.



**TOP:** Idaho Legislative Boot Camp 2022

**BOTTOM:** Oregon Legislative Boot Camp 2022

“After a couple of years hosting boot camps, we began receiving requests from state leaders seeking a boot camp sequel, so we created a 2.0 version and held our first one in October,” Kuykendall said.

NATA aims to not only have boot camps in all states, but also ensure that it engages in the relevant health care conversations around the country.

## “It is critical that athletic trainers have a seat at the table for health care discussions.”

– NATA State Government Affairs Manager Deanna Kuykendall

“Legislative and regulatory advocacy goes beyond the walls of the state capitol,” Kuykendall said. “It is critical that athletic trainers have a seat at the table for health care discussions that impact the athletic training profession and its patients.”

As boot camp organizers and participants work together to realize this goal, attendees continue to glean from the legislative expertise of the NATA Government Affairs staff, whose entrenchment in government lends itself to better support its members and advocate for the profession.

The boot camps are always ready for members, Kuykendall said. To be a part of moving their profession forward through career-advancing advocacy and legislation insight that these boot camp provide, members can contact their state association leaders, informing them of their interest to participate in a boot camp.

NATA Government Affairs Department welcomes anyone involved in their state association’s legislative advocacy efforts to participate. This includes state leaders, various committee chairs and lobbyists, if desired.

“Come ready to roll up your sleeves and put some pen to paper on how you will make big things happen,” Kuykendall said. “We are excited to work alongside you to help move the athletic training profession forward.”

To learn more about how these boot camps have helped members, watch the NATA Government Affairs Boot Camp Overview ([vimeo.com/766646554](https://vimeo.com/766646554)), which features ATs sharing their legislative boot camp experiences. §

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