In the Keystone State of Pennsylvania —

After several years of work, the legislature passed a massive transportation bill in November which, among other things, establishes a Multi-Modal Fund that will provide an annual appropriation of $144 million. We were successful in advocating that walking and bicycling be included in the definition of “multi-mode,” meaning projects that support walking and bicycling initiatives are eligible to apply for support through this fund. Additionally, we successfully advocated for a first-ever dedicated state appropriation for walking and bicycling initiatives.

The year also brought to life Pennsylvania’s Faces of Hope Gallery featuring children with congenital heart defects. These young advocates and their families came to the State Capitol, wrote letters (and drew pictures), and educated decision makers about the importance of pulse oximetry screening for newborns. The result was passage of HB 1420 which was signed into law in early July 2014.

AHA lead the Breathe Free Pennsylvania coalition through tremendous growth over the past year with rebranding of the coalition, establishment of a website and social media presence, and support materials while continuing to advocate for passage of HB 1485 to strengthen the state’s smoke free law.

In the Mountain State of West Virginia —

The issue of CPR as a high school graduation requirement took West Virginia by storm and moved quickly through three committees and the full state Senate. Unfortunately, the bill got bogged down in the House late in the 60-day legislative session. Fortunately, we were able to get the issue turned into a study resolution that will be addressed during interim meetings this fall before the 2015 session begins.

The Coalition for a Tobacco Free West Virginia coalition its push to increase the state cigarette tax by at least $1 per pack, along with raising the tax for other tobacco products to a similar level. Hundreds of youth and adult advocates flooded the state Capitol for Tobacco Free WV day but were met with legislative resistance to increasing any taxes. The coalition is working to build a robust new approach for 2015; it has been more than a decade since the state cigarette tax has been increased.

Our heartfelt thanks to each and every You’re the Cure advocate across our Great Rivers Affiliate states of Delaware, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia for joining us to speak up on behalf of potentially lifesaving policy changes. Your voice does make a difference.

For more information, go to www.yourethecure.org.

The American Heart Association’s commitment to building a culture of health is why we seek to advance science-based public policy initiatives at the local, state, and federal level. To be successful in this endeavor, we use a combination of legislative strategy, lobbying, and media advocacy, along with the passion and activism of the Association’s grassroots volunteer advocates—our You’re the Cure network.

Over the course of the 2013-2014 year, You’re the Cure advocates across our five Great Rivers Affiliate states—Delaware, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia—sent an impressive 42,511 emails in support of our policy issues to lawmakers. Additionally, advocates met face-to-face with their legislators, made phone calls, testified at legislative hearings, spoke with the media, wrote op-eds and letters to the editor in support of our policy issues for a record 5,423 “offline” actions in FY 13-14, an impressive 92% increase over the previous year! These personal, heartfelt activities put a face on our issues and make an enormous impact on elected leaders.

Your dedication to the mission of the American Heart Association puts the “YOU” in You’re the Cure. Your actions helped to advance important public policies that will improve the health of citizens across the Great Rivers Affiliate! Thank you and congratulations on that success!
**State Lobby Days**

Each state hosts an annual advocacy day, where advocates gather at the capitol to meet with their legislators on heart-health policy priorities. State lobby days provide fantastic opportunities for our volunteers to engage in the public policy process, share personal stories and meet other advocates from around the state that share their passion for heart health.

On May 1, the American Heart Association teamed up with Bike Delaware, Sussex Outdoor, Nemours, and other health advocacy coalitions to advocate for multimodal infrastructure investments and to put on Delaware’s annual Bike Summit. During their remarks, the Governor and the Transportation Secretary spoke about the return on investment of these projects in improving the health and quality of life for all Delawareans. The AHA addressed the summit urging on and commending the advocates for the amazing progress in just a few short years. It was an apt occasion to celebrate the news that Delaware’s status had been raised to the 4th bike friendliest state in the nation.

February 12 was Smoke Free Kentucky day, when more than 250 advocates came to the Capitol in Frankfort to talk with their lawmakers about the importance of protecting Kentuckians from the dangers of secondhand smoke. The day culminated with a rally in the capitol rotunda where Governor Steve Beshear called for a vote in both chambers on the issue, followed by a rousing call to action by lead sponsor Rep. Susan Westrom. Also on the agenda were Kentucky Chamber of Commerce President Dave Adtkisson, AHA National GRFW spokesperson Regan Judd, and U.S. Medal of Honor winner Dakota Meyer. As a native Kentuckian and the youngest living recipient of the Medal of Honor, Meyer spoke of his fight for freedom in Afghanistan and the fact that all Kentuckians deserve the freedom to breathe clean air.

More than 60 You’re the Cure advocates showed up in their red at the Ohio statehouse on March 12 to meet with legislators on three important issues: shared use legislation to clarify liability so that schools will be encouraged to open their facilities after hours for increased physical activity opportunities in the community, SB 221 to recognize primary stroke centers in the state, and to express opposition to a bill that would extend additional physical education waivers to students in club sports. Coincidentally, the shared use bill—HB 290—was voted out of the House Education committee during that morning AHA’s press conference on the issue. The March event was just one of four advocacy days—large and small—in the Buckeye State during the past year.

More than 50 advocates were set to descend upon the capitol in Pennsylvania on the first Monday in February when Mother Nature decided to take over and dump 9 inches of snow on Harrisburg overnight, closing down the statehouse. Advocacy Day became a “virtual” event until a determined and enthusiastic group brought the Faces of Hope Gallery to life in late April in Harrisburg. Children with congenital heart defects and their families made the trek to the Capitol to advocate for our pulse oximetry screening bill that was signed into law in July.

February was a busy month for AHA at the Capitol in Charleston, West Virginia. We joined advocates for Kids & Families Day, Women’s Day, and Tobacco Free Day at the Capitol. Hundreds of tobacco control advocates, including youth from the state’s RAZE movement made quite an impression as they filled the statehouse. We also promoted our CPR for graduation initiative with advocates from partner organizations with legislators, staff, and visitors to the Capitol.

**State Advocacy Highlights**

**In the First State of Delaware**

In May of 2014 regulations were published confirming that Medicaid recipients in the state will receive preventive benefits in categories A & B under the recommendations of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. The coverage is offered with minimal cost-sharing to Medicaid patients, providing the opportunity for these patients to receive evidence-based preventive screenings and services necessary to better manage their health.

After more than six years of advocating for CPR in schools, Delaware You’re the Cure volunteers celebrated incremental progress when the Board of Education passed a regulation requiring CPR awareness training; however, the regulation did not require psychomotor learning. Advocacy on the issue continued, resulting in funding for CPR in schools at the very beginning of the 2014-15 year, and an anticipated amendment in the state regulation this year will bring CPR as a graduation requirement beginning in the 2015-16 school year.

And finally, Delaware continued its rapid ascent in the rankings of “Most Bicycle Friendly States” to fourth. The AHA has teamed up with Bike Delaware and other health groups to advocate for multimodal infrastructure investments and to put on 2014’s annual Bike Summit.

**In the Bluegrass State of Kentucky**

They say good things come to those who wait. While there was certainly some waiting involved, there was also considerable work over two years to ensure that newborns in Kentucky are screened for critical congenital heart disease using pulse oximetry. SB 125 passed through the legislature and was signed by the governor in the spring of 2013. We worked through the lengthy regulatory process to promulgate rules that require birthing facilities to do the screening, specifying that pulse oximetry be used and finalized the regulation in June of 2014.

Advocates also fought for CPR in schools legislation and were successful at moving the bill through the House before meeting significant opposition in the senate. Volunteers continued to build support for this policy after the legislative session ended and plan to bring the issue back in 2015.

The Smoke Free Kentucky campaign, in its fourth year, brought hundreds of advocates to the capitol in February and mounted impressive legislative, grassroots and media tactics. Unfortunately, the bill did not get a floor vote.

**In the Buckeye State of Ohio**

After a three-year process that included many small steps forward and many meetings with partners, Ohio finalized Medicaid smoking cessation coverage late in the fiscal year. This victory will lead to healthier lives for Medicaid patients in the Buckeye state.

Likewise, the smallest Ohioans will now benefit from newborn screening for critical congenital heart defects. SB 4 was a top-10 priority of the Ohio State Senate in 2013 and passed through the legislative process thanks to active participation of many families affected by congenital heart defects as well as concerned health care professionals. Because the bill was written broadly to accommodate any future changes in science, we worked through the extensive regulatory process to ensure that pulse oximetry is the method used for screening each newborn before they are discharged.

In the area of childhood obesity, Ohio was happy to receive one of the first grants from Voices for Healthy Kids to address the issue of shared use liability. We assembled a broad coalition of partners and have educated the public and decision makers about the need to clarify liability laws so that schools will consider opening their facilities after hours for increased physical activity opportunities. HB 290 has moved through the House and is awaiting action from the Senate this fall.