Some people kick off a political campaign on a bus or a plane. Marcus Grimm started his on a bicycle.

Grimm, 40, of Lancaster, Pa., has type 1 diabetes. Earlier this year, he learned about Pennsylvania House Bill 1338, a measure that would make school a safer place for students with diabetes. The bill, supported by the American Diabetes Association, would allow school employees to volunteer to be trained to help a child with diabetes in need. If the bill becomes law, someone other than a school nurse would be able to help with the insulin that is these children's lifeblood, as well as to administer glucagon in case of a diabetes emergency.

Grimm, a marketing strategist, wanted to help pass the bill and saw that only three of 10 representatives in his part of the state had publicly supported it. From there, the mission shaped
On July 7, he traveled to each office by bike to ask the lawmakers to support the legislation.

He called ahead to each office to let representatives and their staffs know he was coming. His family (wife, Heather; 15-year-old daughter, Allie; and 13-year-old son, Harrison) followed by car, acting as a cycling-style “sag wagon” with supplies.

Grimm is a member of Team Type 1, an elite group of athletes with type 1 diabetes, and the team provided public-relations support before, during, and after the ride. For part of the journey, he was accompanied by Tim Roden, manager of the ADA’s southeastern Pennsylvania office. The two men were able to educate the legislators and explain what children with diabetes face when they need diabetes care in school.

The 86-mile ride was a rousing success: Nine of the 10 representatives told Grimm they would vote in favor of the bill (one representative was unable to meet with him that day). And all the lawmakers thanked Grimm for making them take the time to really learn about the legislation. “For me, it became more of an awareness [campaign], to put the bill on their radar screen,” Grimm says. “Going into it, [I] thought it would be much more of an oppositional thing. What I discovered is that the representatives are just really, really busy.”

Despite their crammed schedules, however, each representative and staffer who met with Grimm that day took the time to read the bill. That small step, Roden says, may have made all the difference for students with diabetes in Pennsylvania. “Marcus himself did not have to twist arms or say any special words. His action got them to be proactive,” Roden says.

Grimm’s visit seems to have made an impact. Rep. Ryan Aument mentioned Grimm’s ride on his website and noted the measure’s importance. “Enacting this legislation would help to reduce instances where children are exposed to the adverse and dangerous effects of mismanaged treatment due to inaccessibility to school nurses,” Aument says.

As this issue of Diabetes Forecast went to press, the bill awaited movement out of Pennsylvania’s House Rules Committee before it could be put to a floor vote. Grimm says he hopes his ride shows others that it’s not difficult to reach out and advocate for a cause they really believe in. “We all tend to think that advocacy can be difficult or hard to do, [but] look at what we were able to accomplish,” he says. “I did not expect that type of response. It was a real eye-opener to me.”