

Legislative Committee 2024-2025

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Purpose: The purpose of the Legislative Committee is to provide information and assistance to American Legion Auxiliary members to advocate for the legislative agenda of The American Legion. *Standing Rule #5, National Committees – Mission Outreach*

Key Program Statements:

- The Legislative program provides information and assistance to American Legion Auxiliary members to advocate for the legislative agenda of The American Legion.

The American Legion Auxiliary's Legislative Committee is responsible for training members to become grassroots advocates for veterans and their families by engaging with local, state, and national elected officials to support the legislative agenda set by The American Legion, encouraging actions like subscribing to legislative updates, communicating with Legion officials, writing articles about legislative activities, and scheduling meetings with policymakers to discuss veteran issues.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE The American Legion Auxiliary's public policy activities are overseen by the national Legislative Committee, one of the ALA's mission outreach committees.

The purpose of the national Legislative Committee is to train and inform our members to become grassroots advocates for veterans and their families with local, state, and national elected officials, supporting the legislative agenda, priorities, and initiatives of The American Legion. The national Legislative Committee, through its annual Programs Action Plan, recommends that ALA members take the following actions to advocate the Legion Family's public policy agenda:

- Subscribe to the Legion's Weekly Legislative Update for a detailed report of current legislative activities of the Legion. H Subscribe to the Legion's Action e-List online legislative action system
- Communicate with Legion department and post legislative chairmen and request that the Auxiliary be included in Legion meetings with national, state, and local officials, and be invited to Legion legislative briefings and other functions.
- Write articles on the Legion's current legislative activities and publish them in ALA newsletters, websites, and social media sites.

- Schedule meetings with local-, state- and national-level officials to discuss issues facing veterans, military service members, and their families. If possible, attend meetings with other Legion Family members.
- Identify Auxiliary members with personal or professional relationships with U.S. representatives, U.S. senators, and/or their legislative staff members to nominate those members for addition to the Legion Legislative Council.
- Organize informational sessions or workshops on advocacy fundamentals or Legion legislative priorities at department meetings and conventions.
- Legion legislative staff is authorized to travel to Auxiliary department functions by submitting a request to the national adjutant. For further information on the Auxiliary's Legislative Program, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org/Programs/Legislative or email legislative@ALAforVeterans.org

LEARN OUR ISSUES The American Legion Auxiliary supports the public policy positions of The American Legion. The American Legion regularly adopts and renews legislative intent resolutions. The resolutions reflect the will of the membership and serve as instructions to Legion officers and staff as to which legislative issues to monitor and what positions to take. The American Legion publishes and disseminates a range of public policy material to communicate its public policy positions, including legislative intent resolutions, legislative priority sheets, legislative point papers, and congressional testimonies. These materials are available at the Legion's Legislative Center at www.legion.org/legislative. Legislative issues recurring for The American Legion Family include the following:

- **Veterans Affairs Funding:** Provide adequate funding for programs and services of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- **Housing and Urban Development Funding:** Provide adequate funding for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's permanent supportive housing program for homeless veterans (HUD-VASH).
- **Labor Funding:** Provide adequate funding for the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Services (VETS).
- **State Veterans Homes:** Provide adequate funding for veterans long-term care facilities. Veterans Healthcare H Availability of Care: Ensure modern and geographically distributed VA facilities and care in the community.
- **Quality of Care:** Monitor the quality of healthcare provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- **Treatment for Women Veterans:** Ensure adequate and qualified staff and settings for treating women veterans.
- **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; Traumatic Brain Injury; Military Sexual Trauma:** Improve veterans' access to mental health and substance use services, including services for PTSD, TBI and MST.
- **Wounded Warrior Care:** Provide health and rehabilitation support for returning wounded service members.
- **Caregiver Support:** Expand current caregiver benefits to veterans of all eras. American Legion Auxiliary Legislative Advocacy Guide 7 Veterans Disability
- **VA Benefits Claims:** Eliminate the backlog in processing of claims and appeals for veterans benefits.
- **Concurrent Receipt:** Eliminate the deduction of disabled veterans' disability pay from their military retirement pensions.
- **Medical Record Sharing:** Expedite the implementation of an information system for electronic sharing of medical records between the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs
- **Veterans Education and Employment Education Benefits:** Ensure proper administration and veterans' utilization of VA education benefits.

- **Credentialing:** Incentivize states to recognize education and skills gained during military service as sufficient for state occupational credentials.
- **Federal Preference:** Monitor federal agency application of veterans' preference in hiring and contracting. Troops and Family Support
- **Defense Funding:** Provide adequate funding for the nation's military operations, equipment, maintenance and facilities, servicemember pay and benefits, and retiree healthcare.
- **Housing:** Ensure the Basic Allowance for Housing keeps pace with housing costs.
- **Transition Assistance:** Ensure opportunities for servicemembers and families participating in pre-deployment, pre-separation, and transition assistance briefings and services. Americanism
- **Flag Protection:** Seek constitutional amendment to allow Congress to protect the flag. H Pledge of Allegiance: Permit recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance at public events and in schools.

IDENTIFY YOUR LEGISLATORS Federal—Each of us is represented by two U.S. senators and one U.S. representative. To find your elected Congressional officials, visit www.senate.gov, www.house.gov, or the Legion's CapWiz system at capwiz.com/legion/home.

You can also call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 or toll-free at (877) 762-8762. State—Each of us is represented by one or more state senators and one or more state representatives.

To find your elected state officials, American Legion Auxiliary Legislative Advocacy Guide visit your state legislature's website or call its switchboard. A list of state legislative bodies is available at www.congress.gov/state-legislaturewebsites.

Local—Each of us is represented by local elected officials for counties, cities, or towns. To find your local elected officials, visit the websites or call the switchboards of your county government building, or city or town hall.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEGISLATORS

Are you acquainted with your elected officials? Do you know who they are? Their views? Many of us never meet or contact the people we elect to public office. As in any relationship, establishing open lines of communication takes time and persistence. We need to meet new people several times in order to become familiar and comfortable with them. The same is true of our elected officials: The legislative influence of the Auxiliary is based on relationships between members and their legislators, so it is important to work at building those relationships. The best way to become acquainted with a legislator is through frequent, polite contact. Elected officials want and need to know the opinions of their constituents who elected them and will choose whether to re-elect them based on their performance in office. You do not need to meet with a legislator face to face to build a relationship. Most elected officials have local or regional offices and hold local meetings. Visiting their local offices and attending town hall-type meetings are the best ways to become acquainted with your elected officials. Writing letters, sending emails and faxes, and making phone calls are the easiest ways to contact them.

Here are some steps to building relationships with legislators:

- Subscribe to your legislators' e-newsletters, or visit their websites frequently to keep informed on their activities and positions.
- Follow your legislators on social media.
- Monitor your legislators' websites and check newspapers and leaflets at stores, schools, and places of worship for announcements of town hall-type meetings. Attend the meetings, and be sure to ask a question or introduce yourself to the legislator at the conclusion of the event.

- Invite lawmakers to Legion Family noteworthy events. Alert them when the Legion Family celebrates an outstanding accomplishment or receives an important position. Invite your elected officials to address The American Legion Family at a department, district, county, or unit meeting.
- As legislative issues arise, contact your legislators to share the Legion Family's point of view. It is the responsibility of ALA advocates to represent the position of The American Legion.
- Ask legislators how they plan to vote on an issue, and ask for their response in writing.
- Send thank-you notes to compliment legislators on a job well done, a vote we supported, or on committee appointments received. Also, let your legislators know when we disagree with a vote they cast and politely ask why they voted that way.

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

You have the opportunity to communicate with your legislators using a variety of methods. These tips will make your communications effective when communicating with your legislator by letter, email, fax, phone, or in-person.

Letter Writing Hand-signed and mailed letters are always appropriate but may not be fast. For example, letters sent to a congressional office using postal mail must go through a decontamination process, which can delay arrival by three weeks or longer. A sample letter can be found in the legislative guide.

- **Type the letter:** Type your letter rather than writing it by hand.
- **Clearly identify yourself:** Let the legislator know you are a constituent. Be sure to include your name and address on the letter itself, as the envelope could get lost. If you write to a lawmaker who does not represent your area, you probably will not receive a reply unless you make it clear why he or she should respond. For example, if you represent an organization or company that has members or does business in the legislator's district, include that information. It makes your opinion or viewpoint more relevant.
- **Keep it short:** Try to keep your letter to one page or less, and focus on one subject. Summarize your position or request in the first paragraph. Explain to your legislator why he or she should be concerned. The rest of the letter can explain and include supporting information.
- **Be specific:** Ask your legislator to support or oppose a particular measure or take some other specific action. If possible, refer to the legislation by name and number, and summarize its intent.
- **Cite facts:** Do not dilute your credibility by using arguments that cannot be substantiated. Do not be emotional or philosophical. Use justification gleaned from The American Legion's policy materials (www.legion.org/legislative). Two or three short and specific facts are sufficient. Too many can lose your reader.
- **Personalize your message:** Explain how a proposal will affect you, your family, community, or organization.
- **Be cordial:** Respect your legislator's right to have a different opinion. Offer to provide more information to support a change in opinion. Your goal is to build a relationship and keep the lines of communication open. An elected official who does not agree with you on one issue could be a strong ally on another.
- **Thank your legislator:** Be sincere in thanking legislators for their time and attention. You might write: "Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter."
- **Ask for a response to your letter:** If you would like a reply, request it in the letter and include your street address. If you do not hear from your legislator, follow up with a phone call.

Email: Email Most lawmakers publicize an email address for receiving constituent communications. Others use form-filled systems which require you to enter your information and subject matter into an online form.

- Visit your lawmakers' website to find their preference for receiving email communication. Follow the letter-writing instructions for preparing your email communications.
- Fax some legislators have a fax number for public use. Fax a letter instead of postal mailing to shorten delivery time.
- Follow the letter-writing instructions for preparing your fax communications.
- Phone Calls Phone calls are effective when time is short, for example, just before an important vote. They might influence a legislator's last-minute decision about whether to support an issue.
- Before you call, put your facts together: Know the name, number, and sponsor of the bill in question. What specific section(s) of the bill concern you? How does the legislation affect you, your community, or your organization? What alternatives can you suggest to make the legislation better? What action do you want your legislator to take?
- When you make the call, be courteous, brief, and to the point: Identify yourself as a constituent by giving your name, address, and phone number. You do not need to speak directly to your legislator. It is fine to leave your message with the person answering the phone or with the staff person working on the issue. Present your facts and position. Tell the person what action you would like your legislator to take. Be polite. To ensure your legislator receives the message, request a response in writing.
- Thank the person for listening to your request, and be prepared to answer questions. Do not forget to write down the name of the person who took your call. For your U.S. elected officials or their staff members, if there is a question you do not know the answer to, you can refer them to the Legion's Legislative Division at (202) 861-2700.
- Follow up: Find out how your legislator voted on the issue. If your legislator supported your views, be sure to thank him or her. If the legislator did not do what you asked, note your disappointment but say you want to continue working together. Never be rude, impolite, or threatening.

In-Person Visits

A visit to legislators and staff requires planning.

1. **Make an appointment:** Contact the scheduler in your legislator's office to make an appointment. Requests must be made in writing. The legislator may be in session or hearings and unable to visit with you in person. Legislative assistants, however, are very knowledgeable and often specialize in a particular legislative area. Legislators depend on assistants to research information, weigh evidence, and make recommendations. When you schedule the appointment, you will need to identify any topics you would like to discuss. A sample appointment request communication can be found in this guide. Remember: Meetings occurring in your district often carry more weight than meetings in D.C.
2. **Be on time, and be flexible:** Legislators and staff assistants have tight schedules. If you arrive late, there may not be enough time to see the legislator or an assistant. Assume the legislator may be interrupted during your meeting. Also recognize that if a floor vote is called, the legislator will have to get to the Chamber quickly. You might be asked to wait, reschedule or have a walking meeting.
3. **Be brief and on point:** Time is very limited, so making your point concisely will be appreciated. Plan ahead. Write down the issue(s) you would like to address, state whether you are for or against a particular bill, and list two or three important points you would like to make. Use facts, not emotions, to make your points and bring the issues home. For your U.S. elected officials or their staff members, if there is a question you do not know the answer to, you can refer them to the Legion's Legislative Division at (202) 861-2700.

4. Ask your legislator for his or her stand on the issue: Get a commitment if possible. Let legislators know what action you would like them to take. Are you asking for a vote for or against an issue? Would you like the legislator to speak for or against a bill on the floor? Does the legislator have a position or a contact on a particular committee, and is he or she willing to promote your position on that issue to that contact?
5. Be polite: Using good manners leaves the door open for productive future visits.
6. Be gracious: Thank legislators for taking time out of their busy schedules to meet with you. This also is a great time to verify any commitment a legislator made regarding an issue you discussed.
7. Exchange business cards: This contact information will prove invaluable for future meetings and correspondence.
8. Follow up: Always follow up immediately with the person with whom you met to say thank you. Email is best; faxes are less effective. Handwritten notes will be respected but can take three weeks or more to arrive.

COMMUNICATE WITH LEGISLATIVE STAFF Building rapport with a legislative staff member often is necessary to carry out an advocacy agenda. Legislators, especially on the national level, rely on staff to handle many constituent contacts. Also, legislators delegate staff members to represent them at public functions, so be sure to welcome the staff member warmly to events and ceremonies to which you had invited the legislator. After you meet, a staff member likely will summarize your meeting in a memo to the legislator. If you present your legislator with a complex problem, he or she will probably ask for a staff recommendation before taking any action. Depending on the level of government, some legislators may not have any staff support, particularly legislators holding part-time or part-year offices. Legislators with staff support assign a variety of duties to their staff. The positions listed here are typical for national-level legislators. At lower units of government, these roles may be combined into one or two staff members. Most congressional offices include the following staff positions:

Chief of Staff: This staff member directs the staff, follows local, state, and national news — especially those with political implications, evaluates the political implications of legislative proposals and constituent requests, and oversees office operations. Your contact with this person may be limited.

Scheduler: This staff member keeps the legislator's appointment calendar. This individual is responsible for making travel arrangements and coordinating speaking dates, as well as constituent visits to the district and in-person meetings.

Legislative Assistants (LA): These staff members are issue specialists. Almost all congressional offices will have an LA covering Veterans Affairs and military initiatives. Get to know this person!

Committee or Subcommittee Staff: If a legislator has substantial seniority on a committee or subcommittee, his or her work on issues for the panel might be handled by committee or subcommittee staff. They are experts on the issues they cover. These staff members will be responsive to legislators' constituents even though they do not work for a particular legislator.

Director of the District or State Office: This staff member is closest to constituents and is particularly sensitive to their concerns. Though principally concerned with local matters, the district or state director can be an excellent conduit for conveying your views on issues to a legislator. Also, getting to know the district or state director can be important in establishing a relationship with your legislator.

Case and Project Workers: These staff members respond to non-legislative constituent concerns, including specific problems constituents have with government agencies or benefits.

REPORT YOUR RESULTS

Regardless of your method of communication with a legislator, it is important that you report the communication and results to the Legislative Committee chairman at the Auxiliary level (local, state, or national) that corresponds to the level of government of the legislator whom you contacted. For example, if you meet with your mayor, report that to the unit and department Legislative chairmen. If you meet with or receive a letter from your Congressional representative, report that to your unit Legislative chairman and complete the Legion's congressional contact report form (more information below). Report information including the name of the legislator and office held, the topics covered, the legislator's response or commitments, and whether any follow-up by a Legion chairman or staff member is warranted. ALA members, along with all members of the Legion Family, should report results of in-person meetings with U.S. elected officials or their staff members directly to the Legion's Legislative Division using the online Congressional Contact Report Form at www.legion.org/legislative/aar. This form asks for the names of everyone in attendance, the outcomes and your personal observations of the meeting, and any follow-up actions recommended with the legislator or his or her staff. A copy will be provided to the ALA national Legislative Committee.

SAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS TO LEGISLATORS

Sample Letter Sender's

Name Address City, State ZIP Date

Senator [FirstName LastName] United States Senate Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [LastName],

As a constituent from [hometown] and member of the American Legion Auxiliary — the world's largest patriotic service organization at nearly 3/4 million members — I thank you for your continued support and sponsorship of the U.S. Flag Protection Amendment, S. Res. [###]. Please urge your fellow senators to bring the bill to the floor. The time has come for Congress to move beyond more than a decade of rhetoric about patriotism. As you may recall, all 50 states have officially requested that Congress pass legislation to allow the states to vote on a constitutional amendment to protect our U.S. flag. Congress should acknowledge the will of the states and pass S. Res. [###]. Thank you for your service to our country and for your service to us in

[state]. I request a response to this correspondence.

Respectfully, [Signature]

American Legion Auxiliary, [State] Unit [##]

SAMPLE MEETING REQUEST

Coversheet format to fax or email meeting requests.

TO: Attention: Scheduler

The Honorable [FirstName] [LastName] FAX: XXX-XXX-XXXX # PGS: 1 SENT BY: [Your name and email address] [Unit or department position (if you are serving in one)] [Unit ##], American Legion Auxiliary] SENDER'S PH: 000-000-0000 [work] 000-000-0000 [cell or home]

RE: Meeting Request for [Week/Day], [Month ##, 201#]

DATE: [Month ##, 201#] Please accept this [fax/email] as a meeting request with the [representative/senator] for about 20 minutes on [Week/Day], [Month ##, 201#], for me and [name(s) of others joining you]. Our schedule is flexible and open between [XX] and [XX]. Would the [representative/ senator] have some time available?

We are constituents of the great state of [state]. I am active in Unit [##] in [city, state] and am currently [American Legion Auxiliary position].

[Name(s) of others joining you] is/are active in Unit [##] in [city, state] and is/are [American Legion Auxiliary position]. The American Legion Auxiliary is the world's largest women's patriotic service organization with nearly 3/4 million members in some 8,000 communities. Our mission is to serve veterans, the military, and their families. Your assistance in coordinating a meeting time for us is appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

www.ALAforVeterans.org/Programs/Legislative Find this Legislative Advocacy Guide and information on the national Legislative Committee page of the ALA website.

www.legion.org/legislative Sign up for Legion email Action Alerts. Find The American Legion's public policy materials. Locate bill sponsors and co-sponsors. U.S. Capitol Switchboard (202) 224-3121 or toll-free at (877) 762-8762

www.senate.gov View contact information and websites of U.S. senators. Find links to Senate committees and their information on legislation, issues and committee hearings. Check the calendar for legislation being considered on the Senate floor.

www.house.gov View contact information and websites of U.S. representatives. Find links to House committees and their information on legislation, issues and committee hearings. Check the calendar for legislation being considered on the House floor.

www.congress.gov Link to Library of Congress. Search for bills and resolutions by bill number, keyword, or by sponsor. View Congressional Record, committee reports, schedules, and calendars.

www.whitehouse.gov White House

www.supremecourtus.gov Supreme Court **www.c-span.org** Get updates on congressional activities, voting schedules and the congressional calendar.

Important Dates

- Unit Chairman needs to have their mid year report to me the department chairman by January 1, 2025 and year-end report to the Department Chair by May 1, 2025
- Department Chair Narrative Report due to National Committee: May 15, 2025
- Unit Award: Most Outstanding Unit Legislative Program (per division) — submitted by 5 p.m. ET on June 1, 2025.
- Department Award: Best Department Legislative Program (per division) — submitted by 5 p.m. ET on June 1, 2025

Legislative Report 2024-2025

Please mail or email me a mid-year report by January 1, 2025 and year-end report by May 1, 2025.

Unit name: _____ Unit # _____ District # _____

Person completing report: Name: _____ Title _____

Contact information: Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Did you or any members of your unit meet or communicate with any local, state, or National levels of Government? (mayor, city council, legislator, congress, Senate etc. _____)

Did your members receive or send any communication to your congressional representative?

Did your members send or receive and communication from your state senators? _____

Did your unit support any specific bills that would benefit our veterans and their families?

Did your unit members use social Media to encourage support of any bills? Describe

If so how and what did your communicate? Feel free to send copies of your communication if you wish.

Did your unit or members subscribe to the Legion's Weekly Legislative update?

Yes _____ No _____ and if so how many? _____

Did your unit host or participate in any Legislative Workshops or updates with the American Legion? _____

If your unit members of the Legion Family was a part of any in-person meetings with U. S. Elected officials or their staff directly please report it. If you need any information for of what can be reported refer to this Action Plan or the Legislative Advocacy Guide.

Email: Vickie.thrower@yahoo.com Questions? Call me 256-759-4281

Mail: Vickie Thrower-Mills, 184 Mount Carmel Drive, Guntersville, AL 35976

ALA Legislative Program

In local Congressional Districts and in Washington, D.C., American Legion Auxiliary members work to keep veterans' issues in front of legislators, strengthening our mission to serve veterans, servicemembers and their families.

While we may think that one voice may not make a difference on its own, that one voice added to the voice of others quickly becomes a collective power of influence that can impact the decisions of our elected officials. Joining together, Auxiliary members can and do make a difference when they advocate for veterans, servicemembers and their families.

The American Legion Legislative Action Center

The American Legion Auxiliary supports the public policy positions of The American Legion. The American Legion regularly adopts and renews legislative intent resolutions. The resolutions reflect the will of the membership and serve as instructions to Legion family officers and staff as to which legislative issues to monitor and what positions to take. The updated legislative agenda for the 118th Congress 2nd Session is as follows:

Suicide prevention and mental health. Suicide remains a top issue in the veteran community. The suicide rate among veterans is nearly double that of civilian counterparts. It is imperative that we simultaneously destigmatize mental health assistance, while increasing access. The American Legion encourages Congress to robustly fund VA's suicide prevention outreach budget and peer support programs. We encourage all Americans to "Be the One" who is willing, ready and able to have a difficult conversation about suicide and other mental health issues. Legislation supported by The American Legion include PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program (H.R. 2768) and VA Zero Suicide Demonstration Act (H.R. 1639).

Alternative treatments. Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) shows that in 2021, approximately 2.8 million veterans experienced an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder, with 92.4 percent not receiving treatment. More must be done to ensure veterans have access to the effective treatments they desire. This includes expanding research and access to alternative treatments and emerging therapies. Legislation supported by The American Legion includes TBI and PTSD Treatment Act (H.R. 105).

VA healthcare modernization. The biggest issue in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Healthcare Modernization is the implementation of the new electronic health record modernization program (EHRM). VA has experienced difficulties as the EHRM rollout has progressed. Some issues identified were the differences in the training software compared to end-user software, along with inexperienced instructors providing the training to VA staff. VA made improvements on these identified issues. As the EHRM

rollout is set to resume in 2024, The American Legion continues to call on Congress to provide oversight and to hold VA and other relevant parties accountable for the implementation and functioning of the EHR system. Legislation supported by The American Legion includes The Department of Veterans Affairs Electronic Health Record Modernization Improvement Act (H.R. 592).

PACT Act implementation and oversight. Since the implementation of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act, VA has screened more than 5 million veterans for toxic exposure. The average time to complete a PACT Act-related claim is 157 days. It is imperative that VA fully leverage the resources made available in the PACT Act to assist in the continued modernization of Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) information technology systems as well as the hiring of additional employees to ensure claims are adjudicated in a timely manner. The American Legion urges Congress to provide the necessary oversight and funding to ensure VA has the resources to properly implement this legislation.

Safeguard veterans' benefits. Veterans are facing a growing threat from exploitative entities aiming to capitalize on the benefits rightfully earned through military service. These predatory actors range from claims companies charging exorbitant fees to lawyers seeking sizable portions of VA disability benefit payments. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation to restore criminal penalties for persons or companies that represent or charge veterans' fees to file; prepare or prosecute initial VA claims without VA accreditation; and to oppose any legislation that would allow unaccredited parties to become legal representatives without completing the accreditation process. The American Legion's advocacy role remains focused on safeguarding the well-deserved benefits of those who have served. Legislation supported by The American Legion includes Veterans Benefits Improvement Act (H.R. 1530).

Other legislative areas of focus include concurrent receipt, the GI Bill, military quality of life and more.

These materials are available at the Legion's Legislative Center at www.legion.org/legislative.

Grassroots Action Center

[The American Legion's Grassroots Action Center](#) offers information to stay informed on the issues and tools to communicate online with lawmakers and the media about the organization's priorities.

Military Quality of Life

The U.S. military's greatest resources are servicemembers and their families. Without highly qualified and committed men and women, even the most sophisticated weaponry will not provide the deterrence necessary to defend our nation. Factors contributing to quality of life include proper compensation, appropriate housing, quality healthcare, reasonably priced commissaries, and access to childcare services. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation to expand access to affordable childcare, increase appropriations for military construction projects (including barracks and family housing), and ensuring timely access to mental healthcare.

Military Housing Readiness Council Act (S. 2047)

Pay the Coast Guard

U.S. Coast Guard personnel carry out vital national security missions. Still, because the Coast Guard is under the Department of Homeland Security instead of DOD, its members are more likely to experience pay interruptions during prolonged government shutdowns. The common threat of shutdowns brings severe and unnecessary hardship on these men, women, and their families. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation that would guarantee that Coast Guard personnel are paid in case of a shutdown.

Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act (H.R. 2693)

Access to healthcare for overseas military and families

Military personnel stationed overseas in support of U.S. interests and our alliances provide a key role in deterring adversaries from a myriad of actions. However, even after the realignment of medical services in overseas and remote locations under the Defense Health Agency (DHA), major issues involving access to various types of healthcare continue. Additionally, the lack of access to certain types of care limits overseas assignments and contributes to military families being separated for extended periods of time.

Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act (H.R. 1045)

Improving the military TAP

The American Legion urges Congress to direct the modernization of Transition Assistance Program (TAP) delivery using technology and performance data to ensure the DOD delivers a successful program. The creation of a mobile application, providing servicemembers with an extensive toolkit of on-demand transition-related content would improve participation and increase the benefit of transition resources available. Delivering effective transition assistance will ensure a veteran's proper reintegration from active duty to civilian life and reduce negative experiences. Improved TAP instruction will support our servicemembers in finding education, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities and send successful citizens back to our communities.

VET-TEC Authorization Act of 2023 (H.R. 1669)

Protect the American Flag

The American Legion urges Congress to approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the U.S. flag. Additionally, The American Legion urges Congress to pass the Flag Code Modernization Act of 2021 to amend the U.S. Flag Code to codify common patriotic customs and practices as described in The American Legion Resolution No. 19: Flag Code Amendment.

Senate Joint Resolution 34

The American Legion's Grassroots Action Center

Scan the QR code to visit
The American Legion's
Grassroots Action Center



**AMERICAN
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Leg@legion.org
 **legion.org**

**AMERICAN
LEGION**

The American Legion Legislative Agenda

For the 118th Congress, 2nd Session



The American Legion Legislative Agenda FOR THE 118TH CONGRESS, 2ND SESSION

The American Legion is the voice of U.S. military veterans and servicemembers. A resolution-based organization, The American Legion's positions represent the views of its nearly 1.6 million members and shape the organization's legislative priorities for the 118th Congress:

Suicide Prevention & Mental Health

Suicide remains a top issue in the veteran community. The suicide rate among veterans is nearly double that of civilian counterparts. It is imperative that we simultaneously destigmatize mental health assistance, while increasing access. The American Legion encourages Congress to robustly fund VA's suicide prevention outreach budget and peer support programs. We encourage all Americans to "Be the One" who is willing, ready, and able to have a difficult conversations about suicide and other mental health issues.

PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program (H.R. 2768)

VA Zero Suicide Demonstration Act (H.R. 1639)

Alternative Treatments

Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) shows that in 2021, approximately 2.8 million veterans experienced an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder, with 92.4 percent not receiving treatment. More must be done to ensure veterans have access to the effective treatments they desire. This includes expanding research and access into alternative treatments and emerging therapies.

TBI and PTSD Treatment Act (H.R. 105)

VA Healthcare Modernization

The biggest issue in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Healthcare Modernization is the implementation of the new electronic health record modernization program (EHRM). VA has experienced difficulties as the EHRM rollout has progressed. Some

issues identified were the differences in the training software compared to end-user software, along with inexperienced instructors providing the training to VA staff. VA made improvements on these identified issues. As the EHRM rollout is set to resume in 2024, The American Legion continues to call on Congress to provide oversight and to hold VA and other relevant parties accountable for the implementation and functioning of the EHR system.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Electronic Health Record Modernization Improvement Act (H.R. 592)

PACT Act: Implementation & Oversight

Since the implementation of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act, VA has screened more than 5 million veterans for toxic exposure. The average time to complete a PACT Act-related claim is 157 days. It is imperative that VA fully leverage the resources made available in the PACT Act to assist in the continued modernization of Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) information technology systems as well as the hiring of additional employees to ensure claims are adjudicated in a timely manner. The American Legion urges Congress to provide the necessary oversight and funding to ensure VA has the resources to properly implement this legislation.

Safeguard Veteran Benefits

Veterans are facing a growing threat from exploitative entities aiming to capitalize on the benefits rightfully earned through military service. These predatory actors range from claims companies charging exorbitant fees to lawyers seeking sizable portions of VA disability benefit payments. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation to: restore criminal penalties for persons or companies that represent or charge veterans fees to file, prepare or prosecute initial VA claims without VA accreditation; and to oppose any legislation that would allow unaccredited parties to become legal representatives without completing the accreditation process. The American Legion's advocacy role remains focused on safeguarding the well-deserved benefits of those who have served.

Veterans Benefits Improvement Act (H.R. 1530)

Concurrent Receipt

There are currently 42,000 military retirees with combat-related injuries who are eligible for retirement pay from the Department of Defense (DOD) and compensation for service-connected disabilities from the VA. However, retired veterans with a disability rating below 50-percent have their VA compensation deducted from their DOD retirement pay. The American Legion strongly supports ending this inequitable policy, where many military retirees must forfeit their retired pay to receive equal amounts of disability compensation.

The Richard Star Act (H.R. 1282)

Guard & Reserve GI Bill Parity

National Guard and Reserve servicemembers are being deprived of education benefits that active-duty servicemembers enjoy, despite completing the same duties. According to current law, National Guard and Reserve servicemembers only accrue GI Bill entitlement when called to active duty under federal orders. When Guard and Reserve servicemembers are activated under state orders, they do not accrue eligibility for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits like their active-duty counterparts do. The American Legion believes that every day in uniform counts and urges Congress to recognize the service of Guard and Reserve servicemembers as eligible for the GI Bill.

GI Bill for Honorable Service

To receive most VA benefits, a veteran's character of discharge or service must be "under honorable conditions." However, GI Bill education assistance benefits have a requirement that servicemembers receive an "honorable discharge." If the character of service is "general under honorable conditions," this benefit remains out of reach for these veterans. The American Legion urges Congress to correct this statutory incongruity by amending U.S. Code to allow access to VA educational assistance to veterans with general under honorable conditions discharges.