
THE AMERICAN MILITARY RETIREES ASSOCIATION

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY FOR MEMBERS

A GUIDE TO CONTACTING NATIONAL & LOCAL OFFICIALS





Legislative Advocacy for Members

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Introduction to Advocacy Procedures for AMRA Members

The American Military Retirees Association (AMRA) maintains a singular focus to serve the needs of all varieties of military retirees and their surviving spouses. Whether you were enlisted, an officer, a career retiree, medically retired, 100% disabled (T&P), or a surviving spouse from any branch of service, you are eligible to enjoy the privileges of AMRA membership.

The benefits of membership are numerous but the single most important one is advocacy. AMRA is on the front lines of legislative advocacy for all military retirees. AMRA is not only your “Home Base in Retirement” it is your forward operating base, it is your observation and listening post, it is your quick reactionary force ready to anticipate threats to your retirement benefits and respond, react, and engage those on Capitol Hill and elsewhere who would disrupt, attack, or emplace obstacles to those benefits that you served for, sacrificed for, and in many cases, literally fought for.

AMRA’s Legislative Affairs Committee and National Legislative Director work hard to focus on key issues and to advocate on Capitol Hill in order to advance AMRA’s legislative goals. Although these efforts often meet with success, AMRA’s greatest asset is its membership. Harnessing the power of our members is the single greatest weapon that our association can wield when facing off against those who would attempt to take that which we all sacrificed to earn.

This membership advocacy guide is intended to help harness the power of our members by assisting in their individual efforts to contact lawmakers and provide valuable tips for successful communications to Members of Congress, coordinating with AMRA headquarters, knowing which issues to advocate for, important “do’s” and “don’ts” and much more.

AMRA encourages membership involvement regarding legislative issues and communications with lawmakers at both the state and federal levels. However, we must all work together to ensure that our efforts are coordinated and appropriate. This guide will allow each of us to effectively communicate with lawmakers, coordinate our efforts, and successfully protect our interests as military retirees.



Your Advocate in Washington

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AMRA National Legislative Director

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Rules and Regulations

Advocacy Do's & Don'ts

We are all aware that there is a right and wrong way to go about everything that we do. This is especially true when advocating on behalf of any issue with elected representatives and their staff. The following is a short list of important do's & and don'ts that anyone advocating on behalf of AMRA should follow if they want their effort and our organization to have the best chance of succeeding.

Do's:

1. *Check the Advocacy page on the AMRA website regularly.*

This is the easiest way to find the most up-to-date information regarding the issues that AMRA is advocating for and it will tell you whether an issue that is important to you is one that we are already engaged with.

2. *Utilize the AMRA CAPWIZ to easily contact your elected representatives.*

This is the most immediate and expedient tool at your disposal. Using this feature allows you, with just a few clicks of your mouse, to contact all of your elected representatives on Capitol Hill. We have pre-written letters for each of the main issues that we, as an association, are advocating for. For example, during the 114th session of Congress AMRA is advocating for providing veteran status to all Reserve and Guard retirees. Once you've logged onto the AMRA website and have clicked on the CAPWIZ button you will see a box in the upper left with a rotating list (radio buttons) of issues and their summaries. In this example you would simply click on the "learn more" button when the "Guard Reserve Retirees Act of 2015" rotates into view. You will then see a fact page on the issue that will give you all of the pertinent information regarding the issue and any legislation that has been introduced in support of it. At the bottom you can simply click on the "write a letter" button and follow the prompts to send a pre-written letter to your elected officials. This letter can be sent "as is" or you can modify it to add a personal touch to the letter. Either way, it will be automatically sent and signed by you. You will immediately receive a confirmation email telling you that your letter was sent and to whom.

3. *Be yourself but speak or write in a professional manner.*

Whether contacting a Member of Congress on your own or through AMRA's CAPWIZ, always be polite and professional. Our legislative team often overhears phone conversations while visiting lawmakers' offices and we can vouch for the fact that those constituents who yell or are rude to the receptionist or staff member are dealt with politely but are generally ignored.

4. *Write letters.*

In the 21st century it has become very easy to send emails and all elected representatives have a contact form on their website to allow anyone to contact them via email. This is a very useful tool but nothing

can replace the attention that an old fashioned letter receives. Someone has to physically open and read the letter and then carry it into the appropriate office and place it in the hand of the appropriate person. A letter is much harder to ignore or, as is most often the case, to lose or forget about in the course of daily business.

5. *Coordinate with AMRA's Legislative Director**.

Anyone can contact their elected representatives at any time on their own behalf. This is your right as a voter, taxpayer, and citizen. However, if you intend to contact an elected representative as an AMRA member we ask that you coordinate with us prior to doing so. This will simply ensure that we are all speaking with the same voice and not sending mixed messages to lawmakers.

*Please contact AMRA's Legislative Director, Ted Painter, at 508-335-3616 or at tedscottpainter@gmail.com

6. *Encourage others to engage elected officials.*

If it's important to you, chances are that it's important to others. Things tend to happen on Capitol Hill when lawmakers hear from numerous people who are concerned about the same issue. Encourage your friends, family members, and fellow veterans to join in your effort.

Don'ts

1. Do not contact lawmakers ***on behalf of AMRA*** without prior coordination with our Legislative Director.
2. Never be rude or discourteous with a lawmaker or staff member; doing so will almost guarantee that you and your issue are ignored.
3. Do not visit the office of an elected official without scheduling an appointment. Contrary to popular belief, those who work in the offices of elected representatives have very full schedules and showing up without an appointment disrupts their planned agenda for the day and leaves a bad impression.
4. Do not use slang or profanity when writing to elected officials. You and your issue will be ignored.
5. Do not, verbally or in writing, personally attack or threaten an elected official. There are elected officials who may adhere to beliefs or positions that you disagree with. Attacking them personally will not help to advance your cause and, if doing so ***on behalf of AMRA***, will only damage the reputation of the association and serve to make AMRA less effective.

Know the Issues



Before contacting any elected official, it is always important to have the facts and be very familiar with the issue that you are contacting him or her about. The following will provide tips to assist you in arming yourself with information prior to engaging any elected official or staff member.

How to find out what issues AMRA is working to advance

Your first step should always be to check to see if your issue is already being addressed by AMRA's legislative committee. The easiest way to do this is utilize the "Advocacy" page of the AMRA website at www.amra1973.org. From here you can click on the "CAPWIZ" button where you will immediately see those issues or pieces of legislation that AMRA is currently engaged in.

Know AMRA's position on key issues

AMRA wants its position on relevant issues to be known. The Legislative Director writes "Position Papers" for every issue that we engage in. These are located on the advocacy page of the AMRA website. Position Papers describe the issue, give relevant background information, state AMRA's position on the issue, and reference any legislation that has been introduced in the House and/or Senate to address the issue.



How to Find Relevant Legislation

We live in the age of information and if you know where to look, Congress is more transparent now than at any time in our nation's history. Whether you wish to find information on specific legislation or any legislation relevant to a particular issue, you are encouraged to visit www.GovTrack.us or www.congress.gov. These are incredibly useful tools that allow you to search for past and current legislation, read the legislation, track the legislation through the legislative process, and much, much more.

Log on to the www.congress.gov website and in the "search" box at the top of the page, type in a specific bill number, i.e.-"H.R. (House Resolution) 1384" or a topic, such as "Guard/Reserve Retirement" and then click on the magnifying glass "search" icon. If you are looking for a current piece of legislation be sure that the drop down menu box to the left of the search bar says, "Current Legislation". You can also search for older legislation, specific Members of Congress, committees, reports, and more by changing the search parameters within this drop down menu.

Once you click on the search icon, key details of the legislation that you have searched for will appear. These include the bill number with a hyperlink, the name of the bill's sponsor, date of the last action taken, and what committee has jurisdiction over the bill. More detailed information can be found by clicking on the bill number hyperlink, including a summary of the bill, the actual text as drafted by the sponsor and his/or her Legislative Counsel, amendments, co-sponsors, and related bills.

This useful tool can save a great deal of time and can often answer questions for you and alleviate the need to make phone calls or email inquiries.

How to Receive Updates Regarding Legislation and/or Lawmakers

In the section above you learned how to search for relevant legislation, specific Members of Congress, reports, and committees. Once you conduct your search you will have all of the current information available at the time of your search. However, things on Capitol Hill change weekly, daily, and sometimes hourly and you surely do not want to constantly be bothered by conducting the same searches over and over again. Luckily, www.congress.gov provides a way for you to receive automatic, real time updates via email.

In order to utilize this feature of the website you must create an account. This is very easy and takes about one minute to complete. Once you have created your account, simply sign in and utilize the site as described above. When you find a piece of legislation, lawmaker, report, or committee that you are interested in you can click on the “receive alerts” link directly underneath the bold block letter title of the bill, lawmaker, etc. Once this has been done you will no longer need to search for information about your topic and you will begin receiving alerts via email any time there is a change or update relevant to the bill or lawmaker that you wish to follow.

For example, if you are expecting a lawmaker to introduce a piece of legislation you can receive alerts for that lawmaker and each time he or she introduces or co-sponsors any legislation, you will be alerted. If you are following the progress of legislation that has already been introduced you can receive alerts specifically for that legislation in the same manner as described above—just click on the “receive alerts” hyperlink under the title of the legislation.

Make Legislative Recommendations for AMRA’s Consideration

AMRA welcomes input from its members. Should you become informed of legislation that you believe AMRA should support, simply contact AMRA’s Legislative Director via phone or email. Someone will record all pertinent information and pass it along to the Legislative Director for his consideration. You will receive feedback from him as to whether AMRA chooses to support the legislation or not.



Know the Legislative Process

Many factors determine how an issue progresses from advocacy activity by AMRA to actually becoming law. The first step, as described above, is for AMRA to decide what issues it believes are appropriate to advocate for. However, once AMRA decides to advocate for any particular issue, that issue must make its way through numerous legislative hurdles prior to becoming a “law”. The following is a summary of the many the steps and hurdles that any particular issue must clear prior to becoming an actual law.

From Advocacy to Law

AMRA advocacy will generally happen in one of two ways: 1. AMRA will appeal to lawmakers to introduce new legislation or, 2. AMRA will support legislation that has already been introduced. The only difference between these two processes is that, in the case of #1, AMRA must pursue a lawmaker to champion and introduce legislation whereas, in the case of #2, legislation has already been championed and introduced. In this case, AMRA must then assist by helping the legislation progress through the many hurdles described below.

1. Introduction of Legislation

The first step in the legislative process is for a lawmaker to introduce legislation. This simply means that an idea is drafted into actual legislative language and is then submitted by a lawmaker. In the House, bills are officially introduced by placing them in a special box known as the hopper, which is located at the Speaker's platform. In the Senate, a bill is introduced by placing it on the presiding officer's desk or by formally introducing it on the Senate Floor.

Ideas for bills can come from anyone but must be introduced in Congress by either a Congressman or Senator. In order for any lawmaker to introduce legislation, his or her legislative staff must be convinced by those involved in the advocacy process that an idea is worthy of introduction. The legislative staff must then convince the elected official that the issue is worthy of his or her support. Once a lawmaker decides to champion an issue, his or her legislative staff will work with lawyers in a congressional entity known as Legislative Council* to draft legislative language that will become a "bill". Once the language has been drafted and introduced it is assigned a bill number. Those that come from the House begin H.R. (House Resolution) and those that come from the Senate begin with S. Both are followed by the bill number.

*The Office of the Legislative Counsel provides legislative drafting services to the committees and Members of the House of Representatives on a non-partisan, impartial, and confidential basis.



ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

2. Committee Action

Once legislation is introduced, it is referred to the committee that has jurisdiction over its subject. Both houses of Congress are partitioned into committees. Representatives and Senators are assigned to specific committees for a myriad of reasons, including an individual lawmaker's subject matter expertise. For example, Members of Congress who are veterans may often times be assigned to the House or Senate Armed Services Committee or to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. These committees are subdivided into "subcommittees", each having jurisdiction over specific areas of interest within the jurisdiction of the full committee.

Once the full committee has received newly-introduced legislation it must decide whether or not to advance the bill. The more co-sponsors that a newly-introduced piece of legislation has, the greater its chances of clearing this first hurdle. If the committee decides not to support the bill, it will essentially languish throughout the current session of Congress and will not advance. In this case, a lawmaker will have to repeat the process and develop a better case and/or more support for the legislation and reintroduce it in the next session of Congress.

Bills that do get the support of the full committee are then assigned to the appropriate subcommittee.

3. Subcommittee Action

Subcommittees have a more narrow focus than committees. Three main steps occur at this stage:

- **Hearings.** Witnesses are called to testify about the merits and shortcomings of a piece of legislation. Questions from committee members and testimony of witnesses are generally prepared in advance to support a particular position on a bill.
- **Mark Up.** At this stage, committee members may offer their own views on a bill and suggest amendments. Amendments do not have to be related to the subject of the overall bill at this stage.
- **Reporting Out.** When the mark up is complete, a final draft of legislation is voted on for approval. If a majority supports the bill, it is “reported out.” If the legislation does not receive majority support, the bill dies.

After a subcommittee reports out legislation, it goes back to the full committee and will go through the same consideration process. If the committee approves a bill, it is reported out to the full House or Senate.

4. Publication of a Written Report

After a committee votes to report a bill, the committee chair instructs the committee staff to prepare a report on the bill. This report describes the intent of the legislation, its impact on existing laws and programs, and views of dissenting members.

5. Floor Action

Next, legislation is placed on the House or Senate calendar for debate by the full chamber.

In the House, the Rules Committee sets the terms of the debate. This committee may place limits on the time for debate or on the number and type of amendments that may be offered. If the committee does not place a rule on a bill, there is little chance of it being debated, and the bill dies. Once a bill comes to the floor, supporters and opponents are given a chance to speak. Any amendments offered on the floor must be germane, or related to the main subject of the legislation.

The Senate places fewer restrictions on debate. The terms of debate are often set by a Unanimous Consent Agreement, which is approved by party leaders. Any Senator may filibuster, or speak against a particular piece of legislation, for as long as he or she wishes. A filibuster may only be ended by invoking cloture, which requires that 60 Senators vote to end debate.

When a debate concludes in either chamber, a vote takes place to approve or defeat a bill.

6. Conference Committee

Bills may originate in one chamber, and upon passage, move to the opposite chamber to repeat the approval process. Often, however, similar bills work their way through both the House and Senate at the same time. Both chambers must pass identical bills in order the legislation to be sent to the President for approval, so the House and Senate will form a conference committee to reconcile any differences between their bills. Both chambers may instruct their conferences on acceptable compromises. Once differences are resolved and a conference report is generated, both chambers must once again vote to approve the legislation.



7. Action by the President

The President has four choices upon receiving legislation. He may:

- Sign the bill into law;
- Veto the bill and send it back to Congress with suggestions for reconsideration;
- Take no action while Congress is in session, in which case the bill will become law in ten days;
- Take no action and let the bill die after Congress has adjourned for the session. This is called a “pocket veto.”

8. Overriding a Veto

If the President vetoes a bill, Congress may override his decision. A two-thirds vote in both chambers is required to overturn a veto.

Take Action Nationally

Which Member of Congress Should You Contact?

Most issues that AMRA advocates for fall within the jurisdiction of two committees. Issues involving pay, promotion, retirement, and other benefits and privileges of members of the Armed Forces and that are funded through the Department of Defense fall within the jurisdiction of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. Issues involving veterans and pertaining to disability pensions, life insurance, education, vocational training, medical care, veterans’ hospitals, and veterans’ cemeteries and that are funded through the Veterans Administration fall within the jurisdiction of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs.

It is always best to contact a Member of Congress that holds a position on the committee that has jurisdiction over the issue that you would like to advocate for. This is generally easy to do if one of your Senators or your Representative sits on the appropriate committee. As a constituent, they will be eager to hear from you. However, as a private citizen who is not officially registered to advocate or lobby Members of Congress, it would be unlikely that a Member who sits on an appropriate committee but who does not represent you would give much attention to you or your cause. In these circumstances, your best course of action is to contact AMRA, inform us of your concern and let us take the lead on the issue.

Committee Chairpersons and Ranking Members

As discussed in the “from advocacy to law” section above, committees such as Armed Services or Veterans Affairs are made up of several subcommittees each having their own Chairman or Chairwoman and Ranking Member. The Chairperson is always the most senior member of his or her subcommittee and a member of the current majority political party within the committee’s larger chamber. Ranking members are the most senior members of those in the minority political party. Chairmen and Ranking Members are the leaders of their Committee or Subcommittee.

Because the majority of AMRA-sponsored advocacy must go through one of two committees, appropriate AMRA member outreach to any Member sitting on the appropriate committee is very helpful. However, it is always best to contact a member who holds a position on the appropriate subcommittee as well. For example, if your District Representative holds a position on the Intelligence Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee but you’re concerned about a TRICARE issue, it is still useful to contact him or her although, ideally, you would want to contact a Member on the Military Personnel Subcommittee. If, in this example, the Member that you contact shares your concern for the issue he or she (especially if you’re a constituent) may pass the issue off to a colleague on the appropriate committee or they can introduce legislation and seek co-sponsors from members of the appropriate subcommittee and/or full committee. The same is true for your District Representative who is not assigned to the appropriate committee or subcommittee.

Representatives or Senators?

The committee structure in the House and Senate are very similar and the guidelines above can generally be applied to both. Due to the constitutional way in which these two chambers were established, it can be easier to establish interest for an issue in the House of Representatives. However, it is always useful to be in regular contact with both of your representatives on Capitol Hill and because legislation can be introduced in both Chambers, you are encouraged to contact both.

Contact Members of Congress

Calling Members of Congress



Whether you are contacting a Member of Congress individually or as a part of a greater AMRA effort, it can be useful and often necessary to call congressional offices. When contacting a congressional office by phone there are few things that you should keep in mind:

1. The person who answers the phone is usually an unpaid, college intern. This person has absolutely no influence within the office. You may verbalize a concern or issue to the intern and he or she will pass the information, along with your contact information, to the appropriate staff member. If you are a constituent, someone will usually get back to you either via phone, email or quite often via a form letter signed by the Representative or Senator—this will occur if the issue you have called about is a topic that they are involved with on a regular basis.
2. You may have a justified reason for being frustrated or upset by a particular issue or by the Member of Congress's actions or lack thereof. However, do not “vent” to the intern. Again, the intern has no influence and yelling or getting frustrated at this person will accomplish nothing.
3. You will never to talk to the elected official when calling their office. Members of Congress are rarely in their actual offices as they have numerous hearings, votes, and meetings to attend every day.
4. Sometimes you may be transferred to a staff member. After explaining your issue to the intern who answers the phone, he or she may choose to transfer you to the staff member who has “jurisdiction” over the issue you have called about. This is very useful because this person will usually be the subject matter expert for the issue you wish to discuss and will be the person who is best suited to answer your questions and/or give you the most up to date information available. This staff member can also advise you on steps that you can take to help advance your cause such as recommending other Members of Congress that should be contacted and what to ask of them, or actions that your VSO can take.
5. Most issues that AMRA advocates for fall within the subject matter expertise of a Representative or Senator's Legislative Director or Military Liaison/Fellow. If you are calling about an issue relating to introducing or amending legislation—particularly if it involves military service members or veterans—these are one of the two staff members that you may request to speak with. You may also ask to speak with a legislative assistant. Legislative Directors usually have one or two assistants that they manage and your chances of speaking to an assistant will be greater than being able to speak with the Legislative Director.

Emailing Members of Congress

Find Your Lawmakers

To find the address or phone number for your lawmaker, ENTER YOUR ZIP CODE BELOW.

The first thing to remember is that you cannot directly email a Member of Congress. However, all Members of Congress have a “Contact Me” button on their webpages. This is always a good place to start. It is very easy

to utilize and all that is required is for you to fill out the required fields. If you are a constituent, you will, at a minimum, receive a pre-drafted response.

Another method for emailing a Member of Congress is to call the Member's office and ask the receptionist for the name of the staff member that would have "jurisdiction" over the issue you are concerned about. As a general rule, a receptionist/intern will not give out email information. However, if you ask, for example, the name of the Representative or Senator's Military Liaison they will generally give it to you. Always repeat the spelling or ask them to spell it. Once you have this information you can usually determine their email address because House and Senate Member staff addresses use one of the following email structures:

House of Representatives: `firstname.lastname@house.mail.gov`

Senate: `firstname_lastname@lastnameofsenator.senate.gov`

If you are going to directly contact a staff member and **you plan to reference the American Military Retirees Association** you MUST receive permission to do so from AMRA's Legislative Director. The networking circles on Capitol Hill are very small and it can be very easy for an association or individual representing an association to get "blocked out". Reputations can be damaged permanently as the result of a wrongly worded email.



Whether you are directly contacting a staff member as a part of official AMRA business or simply as a constituent, you must be sure that you have all of your facts straight and that you can discuss your issue in depth, answer questions, and ask appropriate and relevant questions.

As stated above, unless you are a constituent or are acting in an official capacity on behalf of AMRA,

the chances of getting a response are fairly low if you contact a staff member of a Representative or Senator that does not represent you. If you are a constituent or have permission to act in an official AMRA capacity it can still take days or even longer to receive a response from a staff member. This is typical. Staff members work very long hours and juggle a myriad of issues from countless constituents or association representatives, lobbyists, and others. Be patient and do not fire off numerous emails in the hopes of getting a quicker response. After your initial email, wait approximately one full week and then send a very polite and short follow-up email simply asking if he or she received your email and thanking them for their time and consideration. If, after one more week, you still do not receive a response, your best course of action is to call and ask if you may leave a message on the staff member's voice mail. If this still does not generate a response, you are encouraged to utilize the "Contact Me" form on the website of the official you are trying to contact. If you are acting officially on behalf of AMRA, contact the Legislative Director and seek guidance.

Drafting Your Email



1. Subject line

Your subject line should be short and compelling—you want the staff member to open it. If you are a constituent, include this in your subject. Include a topic that would be within the “jurisdiction” of the staff member. For example, “Constituent Concerned with SBP-DIC”, or, if acting in an official AMRA capacity, “American Military Retirees Assn: SBP-DIC Question”.

2. Greeting

Your greeting should be nothing more than a simple, “Hello Mr. /Mrs. /Ms.(insert last name).”

3. Body

The body of your email should introduce yourself, politely convey why you are writing, provide any relevant background information about the subject, and convey to the staff member what he or she can do to assist you. Your body should not exceed two or three paragraphs of between 3-6 sentences each.

4. Attachments

Do not include attachments in your first email. Rather, after giving a very brief summary of relevant background information, inform him or her that you are happy to provide additional information if it will be helpful.

5. Conclusion

Words to the effect of, “thank you very much for your attention regarding this matter. Sincerely, (your name)” will suffice.

Writing a Letter

Although you cannot speak with or email a Representative or Senator, a thoughtfully written letter on an important topic may stand a good chance of landing on his or her desk. Due to heightened security, letters can take longer than usual to arrive in the office that it is addressed to. However, a letter is still a very good and personal way to contact an elected official.

1. Addressing Your Letter

To a Representative:

The Honorable (full name)
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. (last name)



To a Senator:

The Honorable (full name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (last name),

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address him/her as:

Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman,
Dear Mr. Speaker or Madam Speaker,

Drafting Your Letter

The same rules apply for a letter as for emails (see above)

Finding the Correct Mailing Address

Mailing addresses are located on the official website of the Member of Congress that you would like to contact.

What to do if a Meeting is Requested

If you are acting in an official capacity as an AMRA representative and a meeting is requested, you must inform the Legislative Director and await further guidance/instructions. If a meeting is requested as a result your contact with a Member of Congress as an individual constituent for matters that do not require you to reference AMRA you may want to follow these simple suggestions:

1. **Dress properly.** Generally, a suit and tie for men and professional attire for women will be appropriate for most meetings.
2. **Be a subject matter expert.** Learn and know as much as possible regarding the topic of your meeting prior to meeting with a staff member.
3. **Expect to meet with a staff member.** In all likelihood, you will not be able to meet with the Representative or Senator. Instead, you will probably meet with a staff member, who in reality, will know much more about your issue than the elected official. You must brief the staff member in a manner that will allow him or her to then present your case to the Representative or Senator.



4. **Bring supporting documents.** Be prepared to fully brief the staff member and have supporting documents that will lend credibility to the case you are trying to make ready to present and discuss. Bring enough copies to leave with the staff member and be prepared for one or two other staff members to sit in on the meeting. Plan to bring enough copies of anything that you intend to present for at least three people, not including yourself.

5. **Follow up.** At the end of your meeting, ask if there is anything that you can do to assist the staff member as a result of your meeting. Ask when you should expect to hear back from the staff member or from the Representative or Senator or ask if it is okay for you to follow up with the staff member at a later date. Do not leave a meeting without a pre-determined means for a follow-up.

Take Action Locally

For the majority of AMRA members, the best way to advocate may be to focus on your State Legislature or on your District Representative or Senator by contacting their staff at their State or District offices. Most AMRA members live far beyond the Washington, DC area and if are one of our members who, by circumstance of geography, are unable to be in the DC area, utilizing the State or District offices of your elected representatives may be the best way for you to influence what is happening at the National level.

District Offices

All Members of Congress have offices in the districts that they represent. These offices, like their DC offices, are fully staffed and ready to answer questions and address concerns. The contact information for these local offices is located on the websites of the elected official that you would like to contact. Many Members of Congress have numerous offices within their districts and one of these may be a short drive from where you live. Additionally, District Representatives and Senators are much more accessible, in person, when they are in their home offices during periods of recess on Capitol Hill.

You are encouraged to attend local events where your Representative and/or Senator will be speaking. These events often provide great opportunities for meeting and speaking with elected officials.

The guidelines for contacting, corresponding, and interacting with these offices are the same as those referenced above.

Your State Legislature Representatives

Your State Legislature is structured in a very similar way to that of the Federal Legislature. You have a local State District Representative and a State Senator who is responsible for representing your interests at the State level. These representatives have offices in your state's capitol and oftentimes in the districts that they represent. Your state Representative and state Senators correspond with their counterparts at the National level and if you advocate through these local representatives, your issue

may find its way to DC without you ever having to travel far from home or make a long distance phone call.

The key to successful advocacy through your local State representatives for something that is actually a National issue is to find a connection to your state or your district. For example, perhaps you have a concern with the Veterans Administration and/or a particular benefit that may affect people throughout the country. If advocating through your State representatives, you need to be able to show how your concern directly affects your State or your district. Remember, these lawmakers represent the interests of their districts (in the case of House Representatives) or their State (in the case of State Senators). Being able to show how your concern affects the people living in the areas that these locally-elected officials represent will significantly increase the chances of your issue being pursued at this level.

All of the above guidelines for contacting, corresponding, and interacting with these elected officials apply. However, keep in mind that these elected officials will be much more responsive to your outreach than those at the Federal level and you are encouraged to be in regular contact with them. These lawmakers may live in your neighborhood or in your communities. You may see them at local restaurants, town events, and stores that you shop in. Their kids may go to the same schools that your kids or grandchildren go to. These officials are accessible and responsive and, unlike their DC counterparts, must live in the same place that they represent. Never pass up an opportunity to hold them accountable or to solicit their support for an issue that is important to you.

Represent AMRA



Whether you are advocating at the national or local level, especially if you are acting in an official capacity as a representative of AMRA, always remember that you are representing AMRA. You can have a very positive effect on our collective efforts by becoming and staying involved in the issues that are important to our members. If you follow the guidelines outlined above, you may find that you not only enjoy the advocacy process but that you will gain personal satisfaction from your actions being reflected in results at either the State or the National level. Never hesitate to contact our Legislative Director with questions or for guidance.

Thank you for your willingness to assist in furthering the goals of the association that focuses on your needs and that serves as your **“Home Base in Retirement”**.

Glossary

HASC: House Armed Services Committee

SASC: Senate Armed Services Committee

VSO: Veteran Service Organization

Co-Sponsor: A Member of Congress that signs on as a supporter of legislation introduced by another Member of Congress.

Filibuster: An action such as a prolonged speech that obstructs progress in a legislative assembly while not technically contravening the required procedures.

Cloture: Is a motion or process in parliamentary procedure aimed at bringing debate to a quick end.

H.R.: House Resolution (refers to legislation introduced by a Member of the House of Representatives)

S.: Senate (refers to legislation introduced by a Member of the Senate)