

Supporting Veterans' Legislation



Marine Corps League Auxiliary, Inc.

MCLA Legislative Support Process

The MCLA Legislative Committee now has representatives for the East, West, South, and Central regions. They will be sending Veterans' legislation information to MCLA Division Vice Presidents who will then forward the information to Department Presidents and members who have volunteered to write letters of support to senators and representatives.

When the letter is sent, the bill number and title will be identified. The text of the bill may be copied. The recipient of the information is asked to follow these steps:

1. A hand-written letter is highly valued and often draws more attention.
2. If you are using a computer, copy and paste this Web site into the Internet address line at the top of your screen when you go onto the Internet for locating your US Senators:
[://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm?State=](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm?State=)

Paste this address for locating your US Congressional Representative:

[://www.house.gov/writerep/](http://www.house.gov/writerep/)

If you are not using a computer, your senators' and representatives' addresses should be located in your phone book in the government pages under Congress.

3. Locate the two federal senators representing your state by scrolling down in the window that says "state". When you select your state, your two senator's names and addresses will show. Click on each name, one at a time. You will be asked to fill in your name address and E-mail. Then you will find a window to write your message. When you locate your federal representative, follow the same procedure.
4. You will be lead to a space to write a brief letter in support of the bill. Include the Bill number and title if you have it. The MCLA communication you received should have the bill number, title, and text or summary of the bill for you to review. The full text of the bill will be at: [://www.va.gov/oca/vet_legis](http://www.va.gov/oca/vet_legis).

Search by bill number at: [://thomas.loc.gov/home/c109bills](http://thomas.loc.gov/home/c109bills).

5. Write a brief letter. The example below may be helpful. Sign your name and office in the Marine Corps League Auxiliary (spell it out - they won't know the acronym). Save a copy for future use. If using the computer, highlight and copy the letter to a Word document so you can use it as an example for the next letter. Click submit.
6. Paste the same letter into the message space for the next senator. Change the name. Click submit.
7. Send this process and an example of a letter to your unit members asking them to take 10

minutes to do the same.

Example letter urging support:

Dear Senator (Your Senator),

I urge you support the bill S. 3421 enhancing veterans' benefits and health care, improves the ability of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to secure sensitive personal information, allows veterans to hire lawyers to represent them, and authorizes VA health care facility construction at sites nationwide.

I represent the Marine Corps League Auxiliary, a national nonprofit organization chartered by Congress. It is one of our purposes to protect and advance the welfare of the wounded and disabled marines and their dependents. This bill is crucial to the welfare of all Veterans' of all branches of the service.

We appreciate your past, present, and future support of all Veterans' issues

Sincerely,

(Your name)

Marine Corps League Auxiliary (member or your office)

(Your address)

Example letter of thanks:

Dear Senator (Your Senator),

Thank you for your support of the bill S. 3421 enhancing veterans' benefits and health care, improving the ability of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to secure sensitive personal information, allowing veterans to hire lawyers to represent them, and authorizing VA health care facility construction at sites nationwide.

I represent the Marine Corps League Auxiliary, a national nonprofit organization chartered by Congress. It is one of our purposes to protect and advance the welfare of the wounded and disabled marines and their dependents. This bill is crucial to the welfare of all Veterans of all branches of the service.

We appreciate your past, present, and future support of all Veterans' issues

Sincerely,

(Your name)

Marine Corps League Auxiliary (member or your office)

(Your address)

Thank you for getting involved in this important mission of the Marine Corps League Auxiliary!

If you have any questions or comments about this process, or you would like to do more, feel free to contact any member of the Legislative committee. They are on the national roster, the MCLA Natonal President can let you know who they are, or their names may be found on the national MCLA Web stie at .nationalmcla.

Legislative Terminology For Veterans' Issues

Compiled by, Caroline Ruhmshottel
Marine Corps League Auxiliary National Senior Vice President

Empower yourself to be an informed advocate for important Veterans' Legislation by becoming familiar with these terms. Some Veterans' legislation has been passed with good intentions when in reality support was removed rather than enhanced because the issues were not clearly understood. May the fulfillment of promoting wise legislation to benefit our veterans and seeing it successfully pass, be an important part of your volunteer service.

Notice the current bill numbers after the description and the note of high priorities of support for the Marine Corps League and the Marine Corps League Auxiliary. Research the numbers by simply entering them in the search window on the Internet. Refer to the bill number in your correspondence with legislators. Use some of these paragraphs in a brief letter to a legislator. See the template on the last page. Fill in a legislator's name, and your name. Mail it soon, and you have become a veterans' legislation advocate.

Medicare Subvention – it would financially benefit the VA and the veteran if he/she could receive care through the Veterans' Administration (VA) with the VA able to receive Medicare payments for their care. Now a veteran may receive Medicare support for health care outside the VA, but not within the VA.

Concurrent Receipts – this is an issue that has existed for over 100 years! Disabled military retirees are prevented from receiving both their full military retirement pension and VA disability compensation. Disability payments are deducted from the retirement pension. The retiree earned the pension. It should be received in full. The disability is a separate issue and should also be received in full. **H.R. 303 [109th]: Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2005** (GovTrack.us)

GI Bill – the 1944 GI Bill enacted by Congress supported service men returning from WW II by providing educational benefits, home loans at reduced rates, and medical coverage. The February 2001 report of the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century sent this recommendation to Congress: "Congress **should significantly enhance the Montgomery GI Bill**, as well as strengthen recently passed and pending legislation supporting benefits-including transition, medical, and homeownership-for qualified veterans". It has been suggested that Reservists and National Guard, which are a major support in the current war, be added to the GI Bill.

Survivors Benefit Program (SBP) – a Department of Defense (DOD) program established by Congress September 21, 1972 to provide a monthly income to survivors of retired military personnel upon death of a service member whose retired pay ceases the date of death.

After 9/11, Congress extended the SBP eligibility to survivors of all service members who die in the line of duty. SBP coverage is automatic for all active-duty members, including Reservists and National Guardsmen serving on active duty who have eligible beneficiaries. This is a gratuitous benefit. It does not cost the active-duty member anything. For the SBP

to become effective and for an annuity to be paid to the survivor, the service member's death must have taken place in the line of duty if he/she is not yet eligible for retirement at the time of death.

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) – a separate program administered by the Veteran's Administration (VA) that provides a monthly payment to eligible survivors of a deceased veteran whose death resulted from a service-related illness or injury. Eligibility depends on one of two conditions existing at the time of death: First, if the veteran was receiving VA disability compensation for a total disability for 10 years prior to his or her death; second, if the veteran was receiving VA disability since release from active duty and for at least five years.

The two separately run programs of Survivors Benefit Program (SBP) operated by the Department of Defense (DOD) and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) operated by the Veterans Administration (VA) collide when a surviving spouse is eligible to receive both SBP and DIC. In such a case, the spouse's SBP annuity payment is reduced by the amount of the DIC award. The reduction prevents the survivor from fully realizing the benefit of the two programs. Repeal **H.R. 1585** for survivors to receive full benefits from the Survivors Benefit Program and the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. The Marine Corps League National Legislative Committee supports this legislation.

Resource for the surviving family of fallen warriors: There is a need for a resource for the surviving family of fallen warriors, similar to the "Our Hero Handbook", a guide for wounded service members and their families from day one through recovery, transition, and beyond. The handbook can be an example for the creation of one for surviving family members. To view this example, it can be downloaded from the Military Home front website. It could be a valuable resource to a surviving family that you know.

Women Veterans', Active Duty, and Survivor's Concerns

A reference for some statements below: "Presentation to DACOWITS" 8 February 2007 by Carol A. Mutter, Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)

- The Veteran's Administration hospitals are under funded.
- Some VA hospitals now have separate women's health clinics. They are needed in all locations to provide the services women veterans need and are eligible for, as well as the resources to provide primary and gender specific care in a safe and private environment. The women's health clinics need to have access to specialists, and case managers who have the time to spend coordinating the care of each woman veteran.
- It is difficult for widows and widowers of the fallen warriors to obtain support and benefits for surviving families. Widows and widowers of active duty military solicit support for potential changes in both DoD policy and legislation
 - As soon as the military member dies, the wife is no longer a dependent and she (or he) is at the mercy of those in each office on the base about whether or not help will be provided with questions about benefits and resources.
 - Support the removal of the Survivors Benefit Plan (SBP) Dependents Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset. The E-5 and below does not get SBP because the DIC offset completely wipes out the SBP. The Veterans Disability and Benefits Commission, a Congressional commission is the place to contact regarding support for change ([.vetscommission.org](http://vetscommission.org)).

- There is also a significant backlog in JAG manual investigations that must be completed, with a “line of duty”, determination before the SBP can even be paid out. So needed payments are being delayed because of workload-worker mismatch.
- Challenges for the active duty widow/widower:
 - The active duty widow/widower did not receive 365 days of Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) like the non-active duty widow/widower. This has now been corrected, but it’s not been made retroactive. They, too, have house payments and leases that were committed to while planning on two incomes and housing allowances. They BAH to continue payments while they make other arrangements.
 - The active duty military widow/widower is left to the mercy of the local commander about:
 - Receiving “basket leave” or sick leave or Permissive Temporary Additional Duty (PTAD) from the date of notification to the date of burial.
 - Receiving 30 days PTAD from the date of burial in order to clear up legal and financial issues. PTAD means the individual doesn’t have to use up their leave balance for these necessary absences; they still pay all their own expenses.
 - Being designated an “escort” so they can travel to where the body enters the U.S., if desired, then on to the burial location.
 - Getting counseling -- Military One Source will not pay for an active duty member to get counseling off base. Frequently there are 2-3 week waits for appointments to see a mental health counselor. Both Chaplain and Medical resources are struggling to meet these unanticipated needs.
- The Department of Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) is a highly valuable committee and needs to be active. The bottleneck preventing the appointment of a new Chair and appointment of new committee members needs to be cleared so they can resume their valuable service.

TRICARE – is the US Department of Defense Military health System. This is the online address: [://www.tricare.mil/TricareMil](http://www.tricare.mil/TricareMil). TRICARE is the health care plan for the Uniformed Services, retirees and their families, serving a beneficiary population of more than 9.2 million worldwide. The TRICARE Reserve Select Program was expanded by Congress earlier this year and offers health care coverage to qualified members of the National Guard and Reserve and their family members.

End Strength - The number of people a military organization is allowed to have on duty at the end of specific time period. The MCL National Legislative Committee supports legislation to increase Marine Corps strength to meet total mission requirement. [_1547: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 ...](#) An original bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2008 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2008 – H.R. 2642
Under the bill, Veterans Affairs receives \$37.1 billion with nearly \$30 billion to improve access to

and quality of medical services for all veterans. In addition, funding is included for new programs that address traumatic brain injury diagnosis and treatment and chiropractic care. Improved housing and extended benefits to spouses and children, as well as refurbishment of old and construction of new treatment facilities are also funded.[2]

A new initiative is undertaken to provide mental health treatment, as well as new centers to treat injuries to Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, including traumatic brain injury.[3] Veteran benefits continue to be increased and the opportunity to identify and apply for those benefits is aided by spending for outreach programs to veterans and their families.[4] The Marine Corps League National Legislative Committee supports this legislation.

S. 1606: Dignified Treatment of Wounded Warriors Act (GovTrack.us) A bill to provide for the establishment of a comprehensive policy on the care and management of wounded warriors in order to facilitate and enhance their care, rehabilitation, physical evaluation, transition from care by the Department of Defense to care by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and transition from military service to civilian life, and for other purposes.

H.R. 346 would **redesignate the Department of the Navy as the Department of the Navy and Marine Corps**. You can submit your comments online at this address: http://www.washingtonwatch.com/bills/show/110_HR_346.html, but you would need to also go to your legislator's Web site. Do a search on his or her name. This bill needs move to the second step in the process, scheduled for debate. Send your support for this bill.

Template for a letter urging support: A hand written letter is even more valued.

Dear (*Senator or Representative their name*),

I urge you to support the bill (*bill number-if you don't know the number, say "a bill that supports"*) (*include the body of one of the term explanations above*)

I represent the Marine Corps League Auxiliary, a national nonprofit organization chartered by Congress. It is one of our purposes to protect and advance the welfare of the wounded and disabled marines and their dependents. This bill is crucial to the welfare of all Veterans' of all branches of the service and their families.

We appreciate your past, present, and future support of all Veterans' issues

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

(Your name printed or typed)

(Your MCLA status)

(Your address and zip)

(Your E-mail)

A letter can be sent on line by searching for a legislator's name on simply "congress" and typed into their form, or it can be sent by the US postal service.

When it passes, send a "Thank you for your support" note using the same format and adjust the wording of the body of the letter to fit.