

MOAA's "**Advocacy in Action**" Spring Event

Our spring advocacy campaign, *Advocacy in Action*, will again be virtual this year and the topics were approved by our board of directors on 29 January 2021. We all miss the opportunity for in-person meetings on Capitol Hill with our legislators and their staffs. This annual event has been popular with our Chapters and Councils, as well as our Board of Directors and the MOAA staff. The transition from *Storming the Hill* branding to *Advocacy in Action* addresses a new social sensitivity to the term “storming” and marks a pivot to leveraging technology and extended engagement this coming May.

Last year, due to the pandemic, we successfully engaged on virtual platforms and took advantage of the opportunity to increase participation. For members unable to travel, the virtual meetings facilitated their participation. This generated over 19,000 letters across every congressional office and 253 virtual meetings to ensure 100% contact.

This May, we will rely on lessons learned last year to make our *Advocacy in Action* campaign even more successful. The MOAA *Advocacy in Action* website, along with the point papers and instructions will facilitate planning and preparation – this site should be up by mid-March.

State Councils, as always, have lead in their states, and where more than one independent chapter is present in a state without a council, we ask that those chapters coordinate with one another. We will rely on your judgement as to the numbers and composition of your advocacy teams; leaders in the field will manage the teams and coverage of their state offices and districts. Council and Chapter leaders may, at their discretion, expand participation to include chapter members. In advance of *Advocacy in Action*, we suggest you engage chapter prospects to generate discussion and interest and recruit them for chapter membership in time to participate in the event.

Our three topics this year address the currently serving, veterans and recent retirees, Guard and Reserves, and their families.

Topic #1: Toxic Exposure – TEAM Act (Toxic Exposure in the American Military)

When most people hear about toxic exposure, they think of Agent Orange and Vietnam. The problem extends to those in uniform today. One of the more recent and impactful examples are from burn pits in Afghanistan and Iraq. Additionally, there are exposure risks from fire-fighting chemicals and contaminated drinking water to name a few. We seek the basics: expanded health care for those who were exposed, the creation of an advisory council, and to reauthorize the Agent Orange authorities which expired in 2015. This issue hits more than the servicemembers – it is a direct impact to the families who are or will be the caregivers.

Topic # 2: TRICARE Young Adult (TYA)

Military kids face unique challenges – the average military kid will move six to nine times during their school years and experience repeated family separations. Yet, current law leaves military kids transitioning to adulthood without the same health care protections afforded to families with commercial plans. Ensuring health care access and affordability is particularly important during the current pandemic. As COVID-19 impacts higher education pathways and makes it more difficult for young adults to find jobs, we must ensure military families who have sacrificed so much in support of our nation have the same health care protections for their young adult children as their civilian counterparts covered by commercial plans. H.R. 475, *The Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act of 2021* addresses this inequity and supports our military families.

Topic #3: Basic Needs Allowance

This allowance helps our most vulnerable servicemembers that face food insecurity—mostly junior enlisted military families. An automatic subsistence allowance for servicemembers whose gross household income (not including BAH) is below 130% of the federal poverty line is needed. This recurring struggle is exacerbated by COVID-19 layoffs which impacted spouses' contribution to the household income. While a small number of servicemembers qualify for SNAP, there are many military families that do not qualify for the program as BAH is considered income; so, they turn to food pantries instead. Armed

Forces YMCA reported a 400% increase in grocery demand at their food pantries on and near military installations during the pandemic. Commanders in the field will appreciate these efforts to take care of their troops.

Planning and preparation

While we work on the point papers and supporting materials, you can engage your chapter members to assess interest in participating and verify you will have coverage for all members of congress in your area (state and/or districts). We will provide updates along the way via the MOAA Newsletter or emails. You will have all the information you need by April to start making appointments throughout the month of May.

And please remember our entire Government Relations staff, along with The Military Coalition and other partners, continues to work MOAA's other legislative priorities throughout the year.

Finally, please stay safe and healthy so we can be ready when the time does come for us to gather our materials and head to the Hill to present our issues in person – that's the eventual goal but in the meantime we have a plan to get the job done this year virtually. Thank you for all you do and for never stop serving.

If you have any questions about our *Advocacy in Action* event, please use this email: legis@moaa.org

Sincerely,

MOAA's Government Relations and Council & Chapter Affairs Teams