



NOVA LEGISLATIVE GUIDE

The Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs was formed in 1980 by nurses at the Hines, Illinois VA, in response to PL 96-330 giving VA Doctors a large pay increase without any change in nurses' salaries or any nursing input. In 1982, NOVA was invited to speak at an oversight hearing and this was the first time a VA Registered Nurse gave testimony at Congress. Since that remarkable day, NOVA has become the **VOICE OF VA NURSES IN CONGRESS!**

Many of you are asking why nurses should be politically active. One vote, one voice, makes a difference and is extremely powerful and self-affirming. NOVA has become that voice for VA nurses. Please use the following guide/reference and tips when seeking to make a difference!

RESOURCES

- American Nurses Association: www.ana.org
- White House: www.whitehouse.gov
- Department of Veterans Affairs: www.va.gov
- US Congress: www.congress or www.thomas.gov

HOW LAWS ARE MADE

Our government makes laws in three ways:

- Legislation in Congress.
- Executive Branch rulemaking.
- Federal Court decisions.

Citizens can participate by voting and communicating with their legislators on the local, state and federal levels. In Congress, a bill (proposed legislation) is introduced in one or both houses of Congress (House and Senate). You will see House of Representatives (HB) or Senate (SB) in front of a bill's number. These letters refer to either the House or Senate version of the bill. After a bill is introduced, it is referred to one or more committees and their subcommittees. Many bills die in committee.

Before a bill comes out of committee, changes or amendments are made in an editing session. If the bill is reported favorably, the bill comes out of committee to be considered by the full House. If passed, it is sent to the other body. If the two Houses pass bills that differ, they are sent to conference committees to be negotiated so that the language is identical.

Agreements on language of the bill by both the House and Senate must be made for a final vote. If the same bill is passed by both Houses, it is sent to the President for signature. The President may veto the bill, but Congress may override the veto by a 2/3 vote of each house of Congress. Once the President signs the bill, it becomes **law**.

Citizens can **impact** the process from beginning to end. Many laws start as ideas by citizens in reference to problems that they are experiencing in their areas or may be submitted by various special interest groups such as NOVA, AARP, Disabled American Veterans, and others.

The more constituents who contact their representatives with their support or opposition, the more we can **influence legislation that affects our patients, families and colleagues**. Nurses should be a part of the process, and **numbers mean influence**.

LOBBYING TIPS

WHY LOBBY - Meeting with a Senator or Representative can be the most effective means to discuss your agenda.

WHEN/WHERE TO LOBBY – You can lobby at home or in Washington, D.C. Give advance notice, ask for an appointment, have contact information - timing can be critical!

DO YOUR HOMEWORK - Before your meeting, know where the legislator stands on the issues important to you. You can find information on various bills and the legislator's position at <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

WHAT TO BRING - Sometimes it's okay to go by yourself or with a small group, but keep the number between three to six persons. Make sure you have the "story to tell," as examples really bring home the message.

ASK FOR THE APPOINTMENT - Suggest possible dates/times. It is hard to get an appointment with the member himself/herself, so you may be meeting with one of their legislative aides. These are very knowledgeable staff members that will get the information to their representative.

PLAN YOUR DISCUSSION - Have some talking points. If there is a small group, appoint a spokesperson and/or have each person contribute, but plan this ahead of time. One person in the group should make sure that each issue is covered and that the specific requests you have are asked before the meeting ends.

THE VISIT - Be prompt and arrive on time. The importance you place on the issues is reflected in your appearance and demeanor. Introduce each person with a few comments regarding their interest in the issue, which group you represent, where each visitor lives. Thank the individual for their time. Don't assume they know what you are talking about – provide a one-page document for reference. End the visit on a positive note even if the representative and/or the legislative aides are not supportive.

AFTER THE VISIT - Make sure you send a thank you note. Review your key points.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Nurses are the largest group of healthcare providers in the nation...some 2.2 million strong. Our voices – NOVA voices – can and do make a difference.

If you need assistance on any issue, please contact NOVA Legislative Committee Co-Chairs:

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SAMPLE LETTER

Date

The Honorable (*Name of Senator*)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (*Last Name of Senator*):

OR

The Honorable (*Name of Representative*)
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20505

Dear Representative (*Last Name of Representative*):

I am a staff nurse at the _____ VAMC (*or VA HCS*) and I also serve as President of the Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA) Chapter # _____. Several members of the Chapter's Legislative Committee would like to meet with you the next time you are in the District. We would like to discuss quality of care issues that are confronting us during this time of a straight line budget.

As you know, nurses are at the bedside of veterans seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, and it is very important to us that our Nation's veterans receive the best care possible.

Additionally, we would like to invite you to address our Chapter later this year, when you are home just prior to the election. The Chapter's meeting is scheduled for _____ and will begin at _____. We will also invite other health care professionals to this meeting.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Name, RN