



The Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA) was formed in 1980 by nurses at the Hines, Illinois VA, in response to *PL 96-330* which gave 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, this was the first time a VA Registered Nurse gave testimony to Congress. Since that remarkable day, NOVA has testified on recruitment and retention, staffing shortages, and submitted statements and letters to Congress on many other issues that affect how nurses provide care for veterans across the country.

NOVA IS THE VOICE OF VA NURSES ON CAPITOL HILL!

Having a voice on Capitol Hill is critical – VA remains one of the largest agencies in the Federal Government and employs over **90,000 nurses**. Having a voice on how care is, and will be provided in the future is critical, especially as VA undertakes an agency-wide transformation and modernization. Our collective voice makes a difference and is extremely powerful and affirming.

NOVA HAS BECOME THE VOICE FOR VA NURSES!

We encourage you to get involved (first by reading and understanding the “Hatch Act” – located on the NOVA website) and offer the following guide, reference and tips when seeking to make a difference!

IMPORTANT RESOURCES •

Nursing Community Coalition: <https://www.thenursingcommunity.org/>

American Nurses Association: <http://nursingworld.org/>

Department of Veterans' Affairs: <https://www.va.gov/>

VA Office of Nursing Services: <https://www.va.gov/nursing/>

U.S. House of Representatives: <https://www.house.gov/>

U.S. Senate: <https://www.senate.gov/index.htm>

House Veterans Affairs' Committee: <https://veterans.house.gov/>

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee: <https://www.veterans.senate.gov/>

A quick overview of how laws are made is provided here –

The United States government makes laws in three ways: Legislation in Congress. Executive Branch rulemaking, and Federal Court decisions. Individuals can participate by voting and communicating with their legislators on the local, state and federal levels.

In Congress, a bill is introduced in one or both chambers (House and Senate). You will see H.R - House of Representatives, or S- Senate 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/or their subcommittees. Most bills never make it out of committee, but if they do, there is a series of events that often take place – first a hearing on the bill/issue in the committee of jurisdiction, followed by a markup which means changes or amendments are made in an open forum. If the bill is reported favorably, the bill comes out of committee to be considered by the full House or Senate.

If passed, it is sent to the other body. Often the other chamber may already have introduced a similar bill. In this case, if both Chambers pass bills that differ, they are sent to a conference committee to be negotiated so that the language is identical. This is where deals are made, and differences are ironed out.

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 Chamber of Congress. Once the President signs the bill, it becomes law.

As citizens and nurses, you can impact the process from beginning to end. Many laws start as ideas by individuals about problems that they are experiencing in their hometown or 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 for, or opposition to a bill, the more chance you have in influencing and getting the bill moving through the process. Particularly if the bill affects many veterans, families and colleagues. Members of Congress are always interested in what is happening locally – the statement “*All Politics is Local,*” remains true an effective in building your case for legislation.

WHY ADVOCATE - Meeting with your Senator or Representative can be the most effective way to discuss your ideas.

WHEN/WHERE TO VOICE YOUR VIEWS - You can meet with your Members of Congress at home in their District offices or in Washington, D.C., either by scheduling an appointment or attending a Town Hall Meeting. *

***More information on how to schedule a meeting with your Members can be found on the NOVA website under the Legislative tab.**

BEFORE YOUR GO •

DO YOUR RESEARCH - know where the legislator stands on the issues important to you. Know what committees' he or she sits on and how they voted on those issues -you can find information on various bills and the legislator's positions on their website – visit the House or Senate websites and click on your legislator – their individual congressional website is public and contains a lot of useful information about their interests, committees, District and Washington D.C. locations.

For information on specific bills and votes, the Library of Congress has a free research site at <https://congress.gov/>

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

ASK FOR THE APPOINTMENT - Suggest possible dates/times. It is often difficult 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. Remember that staff has the ear of the Member and can get your issue out front if you state your case clearly and with factual data.

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 (*NOVA Legislative Priority Goals*). End the visit on a positive note even if the member and/or the legislative aides are not supportive.

AFTER THE VISIT - Make sure you send a follow-up email to thank them and to encourage them to contact you should they have questions or need an expert when reviewing nursing issues in the future.

Congratulations – you have just taken part in Democracy at its best and gained a contact in your Congressional office!

Should you need assistance at any time during the process of reaching out to your Member of Congress, please contact:

Teresa Morris, Director Advocacy and Government Relations – tmorris@vanurse.org

NOVA Legislative Committee Co-Chairs:

Teresa (Terry) Acosta shadowmon@sbcglobal.net

Cecilia McVey Cecilia.McVey@va.gov