

Training Manual for State Legislation Virginia Federation of Chapters NARFE

Many issues that come before the General Assembly of Virginia can have a significant influence on the quality of life and well being of the VFC members, other retirees and seniors in Virginia. Laws passed by the General Assembly may not directly affect the pension income of members, unless the individual is also a recipient of Virginia State Retirement Benefits, but State laws may have an indirect impact on the financial status and on important individual and family decisions of concern to our members.

VFC members, especially those with responsibilities for State Legislation at the Federation and Chapter levels, must be constantly alert to General Assembly activities, be aware of legislative procedures, know the facts on issues affecting seniors and have knowledge of how to influence legislators.

Knowledge and actions with these points in mind at the grass roots level can have a positive impact on our members and other senior citizens. This training manual is intended to provide basic information that is essential to performing effectively in the State legislation area.*

Using the Teaching Materials

This training program is designed to be presented in a 1 to 3 hour session. Materials in the manual may be adapted to meet various needs, such as the amount of time available for training. Also, emphasis and length of training may vary depending on the needs at the time.

The training program may be expanded by broadening the scope of topics and by increasing the depth of the training content. Shorter time for training may limit the topics selected and/or limit the depth to which the topics are presented.

*** Acknowledgements**

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Objectives of Training

To inform Chapter State Legislation Chairperson and Area State Legislation Coordinators on:

1. How the VFC is organized to administer its State Legislation Program.
2. Responsibilities and duties of Chapter Chairpersons and Area Coordinators for State Legislation.
3. VFC State Legislation issues before the Virginia General Assembly.
4. VFC Political Fund contributions and distributions.
5. Descriptive information about the Virginia General Assembly.
6. How a bill is written and how it becomes a law.
7. Role of NARFE members on State Legislation issues.
8. Writing an effective letter to State legislators.
9. Holding an effective meeting with a State Senator or Delegate.
10. How to track a bill on the Internet.

TRAINING MANUAL

for

STATE LEGISLATION

Training Plan for State Legislation

1. Introduction and Organization

A. Introduction to Training

- **Self introductions**—Each person introduces himself, identifies his chapter and indicates briefly his past experience, if any, with NARFE State Legislation activities.
- **Purpose of training**—Each participant should develop an understanding of the importance of an effective State Legislation Program and the impact of VFC efforts in this area on the physical and financial well being of members and other senior citizens. Thus, the purpose of this training is to provide substantive information for developing and maintaining a meaningful State Legislation program.
- **Agenda**—Topics to be covered will be presented in eight segments. The agenda may be adapted for the session as needed.
 - Introduction, Organization and Responsibilities of the Chapter State Legislation Chairperson.
 - Current VFC State Legislation Program (or Current Issues to Be Addressed)
 - VFC Political Fund
 - Virginia General Assembly
 - How a Bill Becomes A Law
 - Computer Use in State Legislation Activities
 - Communicating with State Legislators
 - Role of VFC Members in State Legislation Activities

- Chapter State Legislation Chairperson participating in the training session should be provided copies of the training handouts and portions of the appendix that are useful as reference materials.
- State Legislation Area Coordinators participating in the training session should be provided a complete copy of the training manual. (Sufficient copies should be available for this purpose.)

B. Chapter Organization and Goals

- Some chapters have one member who serves as both State Legislation and National Legislation Chairpersons. It is preferable that a separate chairperson be appointed for these two legislative activities. This is desirable in order to monitor the activities in these two important areas and to keep the Chapter members informed.
- Chapter needs may best be served when 2 or 3 members, in addition to the chairperson, are appointed to the Chapter State Legislation Committee. Individual committee members can be assigned to study and monitor different legislative issues and report to the members. Individual committee members could be designated as the prime person to visit and develop working relationship with a member of the General Assembly. Through these working relationships, committee members can be helpful in acquiring members of the General Assembly as speakers for chapter meetings. Other responsibilities can be assigned to committee members depending on Chapter needs.
- State Legislation Committee should establish goals consistent with the VFC State Legislative Program that is developed each year. Goals provide purpose and direction to the Chapter's State Legislation activities and must be:

Specific -- What does the chapter want to accomplish?

Relevant -- Pertinent to current issues and important to the success of the Chapter's State Legislation efforts.

Attainable -- Set goals in which success is possible and likely (this can be difficult because of the uncertainty in the political arena).

Time Oriented—Goals can be completed within a specified time period.

Flexible -- Should not be set in concrete since the situation and conditions may change.

- Some examples of Chapter State Legislation program goals:
 - Prepare at least four articles pertinent to State Legislation matters for the Chapter newsletter this year.
 - Arrange a visit with each State Senators and Delegate prior to the General Assembly session to discuss the current VFC State Legislation Program, i.e. issues of concern.
 - Obtain commitments from State Legislators to speak at Chapter meetings.

C. State Legislation Programs Organization of VFC to Implement an Effective State Legislative Program

- VFC 2nd VP has oversight responsibilities for VFC Program Committee Chairpersons, including the one for State Legislation. The VFC State Legislation Chairperson is appointed by the VFC President.
- State Legislation Chairperson is a voting member of the Board of Directors.
- Area State Legislation Coordinators (SLAC) are appointed by the Area VP in each of the ten VFC Areas. Coordinator is appointed from among the members of chapters in the area.
- Ten Area Coordinators for State Legislation, plus the VFC State Legislation Chairperson and the VFC State Legislation Representative comprise the VFC State Legislation Committee.
- SLAC's work with Chapter State Legislation Chairpersons to assist them on State Legislation activities. Chapters should provide input, through their SLAC's to VFC State Legislation Chairperson since each SLAC member serves on the VFC State Legislation Committee. Duties and responsibilities of State Legislation Area Coordinators are outlined in the VFC Organizational Handbook (VFC-OH-1) on pages 12-14. A copy of this Handbook is included in the Appendix.

- VFC State Legislation Representative is important to successful VFC State Legislative effort. The Representative works with General Assembly members and the Division of Legislative Services, including the processing and set aside of Bills, assessing the attitude of the General Assembly, knowing the political climate of legislators and being familiar with the activities in the General Assembly.
- VFC State Legislation Representative visits legislators to discuss VFC concerns when the General Assembly is in session. This person understands the pulse of the General Assembly concerning VFC interests and advises the VFC Board when and where special attention and efforts are needed.
- Organizational structure is in place to promote State Legislation activities at the VFC and Chapter levels.

See Appendix: VFC Organizational Handbook (VFC-OH-1)
State Legislation Training (SL-1)

D. Chapter State Legislation Chairpersons

Basic responsibilities of the Chapter State Legislation Chairperson include:

- Assist Chapter President with appointing a Chapter State Legislation Committee.
- Provide leadership in developing a Chapter State Legislation Program, with appropriate goals.
- Work with the State Legislation Area Coordinator in monitoring pertinent bills in process.
- Use information included in the quarterly summaries, prepared by the VFC State Legislation Chair, when writing reports in the Chapter newsletter and when reporting to Chapter members at regular meetings on the status of pertinent bills and issues.
- Work with Chapter members in contacting State Legislators on specific issues and bills—efforts that often require short notice.
- Provide leadership in arranging visits with State legislators.
- Encourage Chapter members to contribute to the VFC Political Fund.
- Arrange for State legislators to speak at chapter meetings.

- Participate in training meetings devoted to State Legislation.

2. Current VFC State Legislation Issues

This segment of the training program is devoted to explaining the issues that the VFC State Legislation Committee has selected for special attention during the upcoming General Assembly session.

These issues represent the current VFC State Legislation Program and are of great importance to the efforts of the Chapter State Legislation Committees and the total VFC membership.

The current State Legislation Plan can be found on the VFC Web site along with talking points to use to discuss and consider the issues.

3. VFC Political Fund

VFC Political Fund was established several years ago as a means to provide funds to support legislators at election time who indicate support of NARFE's positions on various issues. In the past, the growth of the fund has been disappointing, but the increase in the fund in 1999 was more than that of any previous year.

The VFC has set a contribution goal of \$12,000 per year and, hopefully, attainment of this goal will be forthcoming in the not too distant future.

For the fund to be an effective political tool it must reach a size where distribution to selected legislators will be meaningful.

- Contributions to the VFC Political Fund should be sent to the VFC State Legislation Representative, Carroll Graham 1307 Forest Avenue, Richmond VA 23229. When raising and using funds for political purposes, the State requires rigid record keeping. Contributions are then forwarded to the VFC Treasurer.
- The current VFC State Legislation Chairperson is William A Schmidt, 5707 Ottawa Rd, Centreville, VA 20120.
- The VFC Political Fund Contribution Form must accompany each individual contribution. Copies of this form are included in the Appendix. Additional copies may be obtained from Chapter Treasurers or Chapter State Legislation Chairperson.
- Distributions are made in odd numbered years prior to the election of members of the General Assembly. Chapters are requested to consider which candidates would

benefit from a donation and forward their recommendation to their Area Vice President or his SL coordinator prior to the annual SL meeting in June where the SL plan is drafted for the coming legislative session. Justification for these requests should include detailed reasons and outline candidate accomplishments.

- Fund requests are considered at the July board meeting of the VFC
- Fund requests receive final approval by the VFC Executive Committee before the VFC Treasurer makes disbursement.

Special campaigns have been conducted by the VFC to increase the level of funds available in the Political Account Fund. This is done only when it is important to obtain the support of members in the General Assembly on an issue that would either benefit or have an adverse impact on members and seniors. In 1999, and again in 2003, members were asked to make a special contribution to the fund. On both of these occasions over \$25,000 was raised.

Raising funds for the VFC Political Account Fund (PAF) is a continuing process. Chapter members should be encouraged regularly to contribute to the PAF.

- One suggestion is to designate one month each year to solicit Political Account Funds.
- Periodically include an article in the Chapter newsletter with the required form to be used for contributing funds to the PAF. The article should explain the benefits to members through their contributions to the PAF.

4. Virginia General Assembly

A. Description

- General Assembly consists of the Senate and the House of Delegates. The State is divided into 40 Senate Districts and 100 House of Delegate Districts.
- General Assembly meets annually, beginning on the second Wednesday in January, for 60 days in even-numbered years and for 30 days in odd-numbered years, with an option to extend annual sessions for a maximum of 30 days.
- Governor may call a special session of the General Assembly when it is deemed necessary or advisable. He must also call a special session when petitioned by two-thirds of the members of both Houses. A reconvened session is held on the sixth Wednesday after adjournment of each regular or special session for the purpose of considering the Governor's recommendations and vetoed legislation.

- General Assembly's chief responsibilities are to represent citizens in the formulation of public policy, enact laws of the Commonwealth, approve the budget, levy taxes, elect judges and confirm appointments by the Governor.

B. House of Delegates

- House of Delegates consists of 100 members. Each member represents approximately 63,000 citizens. House membership primarily consists of attorneys, business executives, educators and farmers.
- Term of office for a member of the House of Delegates is two years. Each member currently receives an annual salary of \$17,640.
- Speaker of the House is the presiding officer of the House and is elected by the House in even-numbered years for a two-year term. Speaker's duties are dictated by the Rules of the House. Among these duties are the assigning of bills to committee and appointing the membership of the 20 House standing committees.
- Clerk of the House is elected by the House in even-numbered years for a two year term and is responsible for the administration of the House under the direction of the Speaker.

C. Senate

- Senate of Virginia consists of 40 members. Each member is elected for a term of four years and currently receives an annual salary of \$18,000. A Senator represents approximately 155,000 citizens of the Commonwealth. Membership of the Senate consists of a diverse group ordinarily composed of lawyers, business executives, farmers, bankers, educators, and CPAs. Presently the Senate is controlled by Republicans.
- Lieutenant Governor is the presiding officer of the Senate and is elected in a statewide election for a four-year term. In the event of his absence, the President Pro Tempore carries out the duties of the presiding officer. President Pro Tempore is elected by the Senate for a term of four years.
- Clerk of the Senate is elected by the Senate. Clerk's duties are overseeing the daily operations of the Senate, keeping all Senate records, keeping the daily Journal and referring bills to committees.
- Senate Chamber is located in the west wing of the State Capitol Building and is open to the public when the Senate is not in session.

5. How a Bill Becomes a Law in Virginia

A. Normal Procedure Whereby a Non-Controversial Bill Becomes a Law

- Bills may originate in either the House of Delegates or the Senate.
- Delegate Lee, as requested by constituents, prepares to introduce legislation permitting the governing bodies of localities to prohibit the sale and use of certain fireworks.
- Delegate Lee then explains exactly the proposal he has in mind to a staff attorney in the Division of Legislative Services. The staff attorney checks existing law and the constitutionality of the proposed legislation.
- A bill is then drafted by the Division of Legislative Services. Draft copies of the bill are made and delivered to Delegate Lee.
- Delegate Lee signs his name on the bill and introduces it by laying the original and duplicate copies on the desk of the Clerk of the House of Delegates.
- Bill is ordered printed and referred to the Committee on Counties, Cities and Towns. Members of the Committee on Counties, Cities and Towns -- in public session -- familiarize themselves with the bill and decide to approve it without amendments.
- Committee then reports the bill favorably to the House.
- **First Reading:** Bill title is printed in the calendar or is read by the Clerk and the bill advances to second reading.
- **Second Reading:** Next day the bill title appears in the printed calendar on second reading. Bills are considered in the order in which they appear in the calendar. Clerk reads the title of the bill a second time. Bills on second reading are amendable. Bill is explained by its patron (Delegate Lee) who answers any questions that may be asked. By voice vote the House votes to advance the bill to third reading.
- Bills that passed a second reading with or without amendments is engrossed. If amendments are adopted the bill is reprinted in its final form for passage.
- **Third Reading:** Next day, the engrossed bill title appears in the House calendar on third reading. Bill is read by title a third time by the Clerk. By recorded roll call vote the bill is passed by the House of Delegates.
- **Communication:** When passed, the bill is sent to the Senate either by the Clerk in communication or by a member in person, informing the Senate that the bill has passed the House and requesting the concurrence of the Senate.
- **In the Senate:** Bill goes through substantially the same procedure as it did in the House. Bill is read by title a first time, referred to a standing committee, considered and reported by the committee, read a second time and a third time before passage by a constitutional majority.

- When the House amends a Senate bill, or the Senate amends a House bill, and the body of origin disagrees with the amendment, a conference committee, usually three members from each legislative body, may be formed to resolve differences.
- After the bill has been passed by both Houses of the General Assembly.
 - It is printed as an enrolled bill, examined and signed by the presiding officer of each house.
 - Bill is then sent to the governor for his approval.
 - After being signed by the Governor, the bill is sent to the Clerk of the House (Keeper of the Rolls of the State) and is assigned a Chapter number. All Chapters of a session are compiled and bound as the Acts of Assembly.
- Bills enacted at a regular session (or reconvened session which follows) are effective the 1st day of July following adjournment of the regular session, unless another date is specified.
- Bills enacted at a special session (or reconvened session) are effective the 1st day of the 4th month following the adjournment of the special session, unless another date is specified.
- General Appropriation Act is usually effective July 1st. Emergency Acts become effective when signed by the Governor.

B. The Role of the Governor

- For bills presented, the Constitution of Virginia provides the Governor with three options: sign, veto, or offer amendments.
- Governor may also veto one or more items in an appropriation bill. When the Governor does not act on a bill, it becomes law without his signature.
- During the regular or special session, the Governor has seven days to act on bills presented to him. If there are fewer than seven days remaining in the General Assembly session, or if the General Assembly has adjourned, the Governor has thirty days after adjournment to act on bills.
- When the Governor recommends amendments to or vetoes a bill, and the General Assembly is still in session, the General Assembly can consider the Governor's action.
- When the General Assembly receives recommended amendments or vetoed legislation from the Governor, it is sent to the House of origin, i.e. House bills are sent to the House of Delegates and Senate bills are sent to the Senate. There are various constitutional options available to the General Assembly:
 - Governor's amendments can be agreed to or rejected. If the amendments are agreed to by both houses, the amended bill is reenrolled and becomes law. Governor's amendments may be rejected and the original bill sent back to the Governor where it may be signed

as originally presented or vetoed. House of origin, having rejected a Governor's amendment, can pass the bill as originally presented to the Governor by a vote of two-thirds of the members of each body.

- Governor must submit amendments in a form that allows the General Assembly to act on each amendment individually. The General Assembly may accept or reject part of the amendments. Bills are then returned to the Governor with the amendments agreed to by the General Assembly. Governor may approve or veto the bill as amended. When the Governor does not act, the bill will become law without his signature.
- If either house of the General Assembly determines that the Governor's amendments are not specific and severable (able to be acted upon individually), that House may refer the bill to committee and the bill will be treated as if it is just introduced. If the bill is then passed by the General Assembly, it is enrolled and sent back to the Governor for approval or veto.
- Governor's vetoes may be upheld or overridden. If the veto is upheld, the bill dies. The vote to override a Governor's veto requires a two-thirds vote of both the House of Delegates and the Senate.

C. House of Delegate Committees

Agriculture
 Appropriations
 Chesapeake and Its Tributaries
 Claims
 Conservation & Natural Resources
 Corporations, Insurance and Banking
 Counties, Cities and Towns
 Courts of Justice
 Education
 Finance
 General Laws
 Health, Welfare and Institutions
 Interstate Cooperation
 Labor and Commerce
 Militia and Police
 Mining and Mineral Resources
 Privileges and Elections
 Rules

Science and Technology
Transportation

D. Senate Committees

Agriculture
Commerce and Labor
Courts of Justice
Education and Health
Finance
General Laws
Local Government
Privileges and Elections
Rehabilitation and Social Services
Rules
Transportation

See Appendix: State Legislative Training (SL-1)

6. Computer Use in State Legislative Efforts

A. Tracking the General Assembly Activities

To track and learn more about the General Assembly, use the following web sites:

Virginia General Assembly Home Page: <http://legis.state.va.us/>

Legislation Before House and Senate: <http://leg1.state.va.us/>

Senate Web Site:

<http://senate.state.va.us/>

House Web Site:

<http://hod.state.va.us/>

Governor's Web site:

www.state.va.us/governor

Gateway Virginia Home Page:

<http://www.gatewayva.com>

B. Tracking a Bill

- Division of Legislative Automated Systems (DLAS) provides hints for using Legislative Information Systems (LIS), commonly called Bill Status. Below are the hints for using the Legislative Information System (LIS) to aid in tracking a bill.

- When you know the bill or resolution number, click on [Bills and Resolutions](#), key the legislative type and number in the box, and press enter. For example, to look up House Bill 1, key in HB1 and press enter.
- Valid legislative types are:
 - HB** = House Bill; **HJ** = House Joint Resolutions;
 - HR** = House Resolutions
 - SB** = Senate Bills; **SJ** = Senate Joint Resolutions;
 - SR** = Senate Resolutions
- When you don't know the bill or resolution number there are several ways to find it. When you know the name of the Delegate or Senator who sponsored the legislation, click on [General Assembly Members](#) and view the list of legislation sponsored by the member. Each list displays the number and a brief description of the bill or resolution. Once you locate the specific legislation, click on the line to display the summary and history. The text history entries will be displayed and you can then click on the desired version to see the full text.
- [Comprehensive Index](#) locates a bill or resolution by subject. Scroll through the Index Table of Contents, click on the desired subject and view the index entries. Once you locate the legislation, click on the bill number to view the summary and history. Text history entries will be displayed and you can click on the desired version to view the full text.
- Searchable database (for Bills and Resolutions) provides another way to locate legislation by searching for key word(s) or code section(s). Click on [Search: Bills and Resolutions](#) and key in a word or phrase in the box and press enter. A list of bills satisfying your search will be displayed. Click on the desired bill to display the full text. Full text display will link to the summary and status display.
- To see a list of all legislation introduced, click on Bills & Resolutions and then click on [All](#). This list will be displayed in numerical order with House legislation being displayed before Senate legislation. Once you locate legislation of interest, click on the legislation number to display the summary and history. You can select the full text version from this display.
- To see a list of legislation introduced for a specific day, click on Bills and Resolutions and then click on [Introduced](#). The most recent day will be displayed. You can select any day by keying a date (in month-day format) in the box.
- Budget Bills may be found under [By subject](#) on the Bills and Resolutions display. Choose Appropriations and then select the appropriate bill. From the summary page, you can search the budget bill by clicking on Presented and Ordered Printed.
- [Standing Committees](#) provides a list of all standing committees for the House and Senate. The information available for each committee consists of Committee

Members, Dockets and separate listings of legislation referred to committee, currently before the committee, reported out of committee, and failed.

- Meetings provides a list of standing committee and subcommittee meetings during the General Assembly session. During the interim, all meetings held in the Capitol and General Assembly Building are listed as well as related meetings held around the state.
- Minutes provides a daily record of House and Senate floor sessions.
- Statistics displays totals of bills introduced, passed, failed, vetoed and continued, as of the current date and time.
- Calendars (from Bills and Resolutions) list legislation to be considered by the House and Senate for a specific day. Click On Calendar and then choose a specific date. Click on the desired calendar category to display a list of legislation.
- Code of Virginia searchable database contains the laws (statutes) of the Commonwealth. You can perform a search by using key word(s), phrases or section numbers. You can also use the Table of Contents to view all Titles, Chapters, Articles and Sections. Click on a title to display the chapters, click on a chapter to display the articles and click on an article to display the sections.
- Virginia Administrative Code (regulations of state agencies) is also searchable. You can use the Table of Contents to view all Titles, Agencies, Chapters and Sections. Click a title to display the agencies, click on agency name to display the chapters and click on chapter number to display the sections.

Reference: Internet Web Page -- Virginia Legislature
<http://legis.state.va.us/vaonline/v.htm>

7. Communicating With Your State Legislators

A. Effective Letters to Your Senator or Delegate

- Letters should be personal, polite and concise.
- Limit a letter to one page, preferably typed, but if not, written legibly.
- State purpose of letter in first paragraph.
- Cite bill by name and number if known.
- Avoid emotions.
- Show how legislation will affect you.
- Suggest a better approach.
- Cite likely adverse effects.

B. Effective Meetings with your State Senator or Delegate

- Legislator's method of operation is an extension of his personality. As a manager, one legislator may direct his office and staff differently from another. It is to your advantage to discover such variances before your first meeting.
- Preparations that should be made for a meeting are:
 - Call his/her office to schedule an appointment.
 - Carefully select chapter members who will attend
 - Brief members and assign discussion topics.
 - Complete knowledge of your subject(s) is the first requirement for success. Do your homework!
 - Call or write to confirm the appointment shortly before the date set.
- During the meeting things that should be done are:
 - Appoint a key speaker.
 - Be brief, knowledgeable and polite.
 - Follow your agenda and always stick to the facts.
 - Avoid wild speculation and overstatements.
 - Be prepared to answer as well as to ask questions in areas of disagreement.
 - See whether a compromise or new idea can be brought forth when there is disagreement.
 - Leave a fact sheet.
 - Leave a good lasting impression.
 - Follow up your visit with a thank you letter.

See Appendix: State Legislation Training (SL-1)

8. Role of the VFC Members in State Legislation Efforts

Successful VFC State Legislation efforts will only come about if the members play an active role.

- Members must contact their Senators and Delegates and discuss the VFC issues and let them know where they stand.
- Members must contribute to the VFC Political Account Fund so NARFE can support those candidates who will stand with us on issues.
- Let candidates and legislators for the General Assembly know by our actions that we are serious about the VFC issues. Take an active part in political rallies and other political events.
- Work with others on mutual concerns. Some contacts in this regard include:

- Virginia Association of Area Agencies on Aging
 - Virginia Coalition on Aging
 - AARP State Legislation
 - The Retired Officers Association
 - State Board of Elections Office
 - Senators and Delegates favorable to our issues
- Maintain a continuous vigilance of the activities in the General Assembly and be prepared to act on issues of concern to senior citizens.