

Advocacy in Action: MOAA Members Rally on Capitol Hill

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MOAA members and staff pose in front of the Capitol building in Washington, D.C., on April 17 before visiting legislative offices as part of the annual Advocacy in Action event. (Photo by Mike Morones/MOAA)

Advocates from across the nation brought MOAA's message to Capitol Hill on Wednesday on behalf of not just their fellow MOAA members, but the entire uniformed services community.

That message included an ongoing effort to [support combat-injured veterans](#), helping young servicemembers and their families [cover housing costs](#), and protecting the [earned TRICARE For Life benefit](#). These issues made up Advocacy in Action (AiA), MOAA's annual spring campaign, and were delivered to the doorsteps of hundreds of legislators by their constituents, with support from MOAA National staff.



"Days like today show the strength of MOAA -- what this organization can do." Lt. Gen. Brian T. Kelly said after the event. "Our members bring a powerful message, and it's an honor to work alongside them on days like this, and on their behalf not just today, but the other 364 days of the year."



From left, MOAA board member Col. Peter Kloeber, USAF (Ret), President and CEO Lt. Gen. Brian T. Kelly, USAF (Ret), and Board Chair Gen. Gary L. North, USAF (Ret), pose with a full-page MOAA ad in The Hill newspaper which appeared April 17 to coincide with Advocacy in Action efforts. (Photo by Mike Morones/MOAA)

The day's final event featured remarks from Rep. Chrissy Houlahan (D-Pa.), the ranking member on the House Armed Services Committee's Quality of Life Panel. The panel's report, released just days before AiA, included several of MOAA's legislative priorities in support of military families, including the AiA push to restore the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) to 100% of rental and utility costs.

[\[MORE ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE PANEL REPORT | READ THE REPORT\]](#)

"Your presence really underscores the importance of the work that you do here -- advocating for the issues that matter the most, specifically for our military community," Houlahan, a former Air Force officer, told the group.

"I do very much appreciate you being here ... because your work helps inform us. It informs our committees, it informs the members themselves about the issues that you

care about. My staff and I remind ourselves all the time that the squeaky wheel gets the grease -- if you see something, you need to say something.

"There's literally nothing wrong with lobbying," Houlahan added. "There's nothing wrong with advocating for the things that you need. That's important ... because I don't know your stories."

The representative also briefed attendees on the progress of the Quality of Life Panel's report toward becoming law as part of the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), along with other military and veterans issues.

Making an Impact

Houlahan was far from the only lawmaker to connect with MOAA throughout the day, with dozens of advocacy teams meeting legislators and staffers throughout the capital.

"The delegations have been very supportive of what we're doing," said first-time attendee Brig. Gen. Paul Loiselle, who recently retired from the Army National Guard and serves as vice chair of MOAA's Southern Maine Chapter. "They've been very plugged in."

Learn More

- [Support the Major Richard Star Act](#)
- [Support the BAH Restoration Act](#)
- [Protect TRICARE For Life](#)
- EVEN MORE: [MOAA.org/AiA](https://www.moaa.org/AiA)

The work hasn't been limited to in-person visits. MOAA members have sent more than 15,000 messages to legislators on these three topics in the weeks since their announcement using our [Legislative Action Center](#). And with the annual NDAA coming together in the halls of Congress in the near future, those messages will resonate louder than ever.



From left, MOAA Missouri Council of Chapters President Lt. Col. William Wolfinger, USA (Ret), MOAA Board Member Lt. Col. Aric J. Raus, USA, and Rep. Eric Burlison (R-Mo.) meet April 17 in Washington, D.C., as part of MOAA's annual Advocacy in Action event. (Submitted photo)

'Leave It Better Than When We Started'

Brooke Johnson, a member of MOAA's Currently Serving Spouse Advisory Council who took part in her first AiA event, said she's moved eight times during her husband's 16 years of service in the Air Force, often struggling to find suitable housing for a family of three.

"We've never gotten to live on base," said Johnson, whose family is in the majority of the military that relies on BAH when navigating the off-base housing market. According to a recent Blue Star Families survey, more than 70% of such families pay at least \$200 more a month toward housing costs than they receive in their monthly housing allowance.



Photo by Mike Morones/MOAA

This can force some tough decisions.

"It can mean a longer commute. It can mean safety concerns. It can mean school concerns," said Johnson, a teacher and mother of three.

She said she hoped her AiA work would "leave it better than we started" for military spouses and families -- sentiments echoed by Matrice Williamson, also making her first AiA trip. A mother of a veteran and a U.S. Naval Academy student and the wife of a career Marine officer, Williamson has made 16 moves during her husband's three decades in uniform.

The AiA experience on Capitol Hill will help her "be in the know" when discussing service and recruiting concerns with parents and other influencers, Williamson said, allowing her to "be the mom who can give encouragement to the parents to encourage their son or their daughter to serve."

Capital Camaraderie

The hundreds of Capitol Hill office visits served as the highlight of a week that included a meeting of MOAA's board of directors, an April 16 recognition ceremony honoring [2024 award recipients](#), and an April 18 seminar for MOAA council presidents.

However, the conclusion of the annual advocacy visits does not mean the work on these priorities will slow.

"AiA isn't a capstone event -- it's another step in a MOAA advocacy process that's [lasted 95 years](#)," said Col. Dan Merry, USAF (Ret), MOAA's director of Government Relations. "We need our members to remain active, not just by sending their own messages to lawmakers, but by [sharing the action center link](#) and spreading the word through their communities and their professional networks. These legislators need to hear from their constituents, especially in an election year."