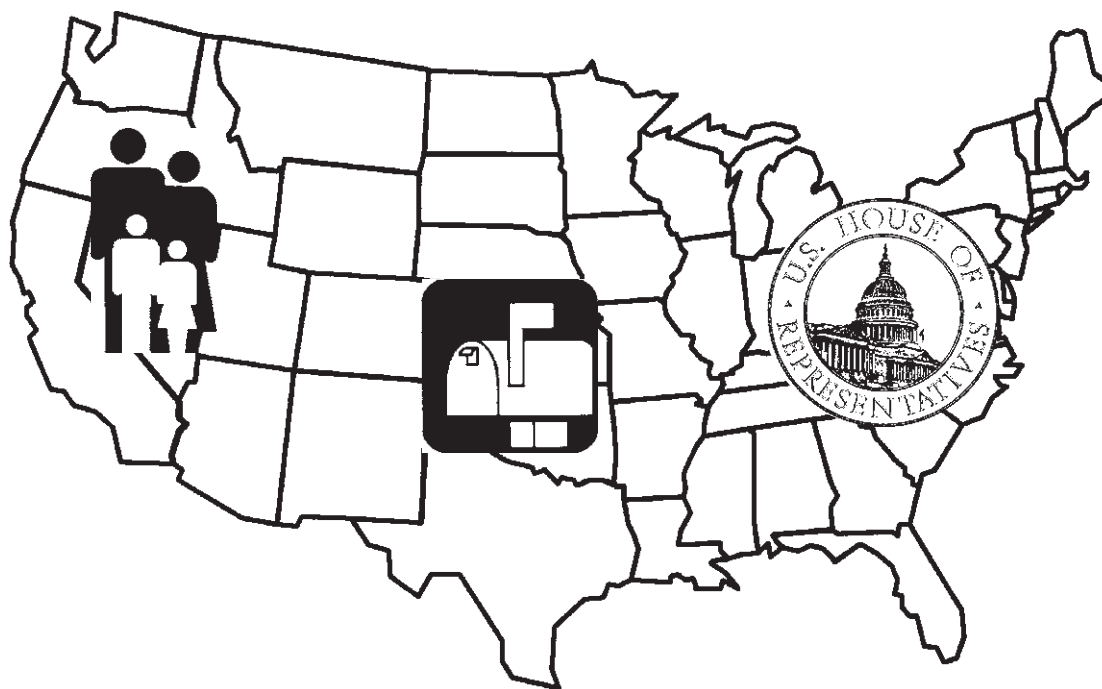


A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO

CONSTITUENT SERVICE

NINTH EDITION

INSTRUCTIONS, LETTERS,
FORMS, & ADVICE



PREPARED BY

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NORTH CAROLINA

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FOREWORD

When candidates run for office, they usually concentrate on the important policy matters which affect their constituents. Taxes, budgets, education, homeland security, and a myriad of other issues are often at the forefront.

Although shaping policy is certainly the most important function of public servants in legislative offices, many elected officials are surprised at the number of requests they receive to help constituents overcome problems with government. It is not uncommon for a Congressional office to receive thousands of requests for help each year, and casework can quickly become overwhelming if the staff is not prepared for it.

Elected officials who handle casework quickly and effectively have become an important part of our system of government. Also, efficient handling of requests can build much goodwill with the constituents.

This book, developed over several years by U.S. Rep. Cass Ballenger (NC) and his staff, is an excellent reference tool for caseworkers. It covers the major casework categories and provides helpful advice on dealing with constituents and solving their problems.

All new caseworkers should read Section 1, *An Introduction to Casework*, and become thoroughly familiar with it. The remainder of the book covers specific casework categories, arranged alphabetically by topic. Caseworkers should study the sections that are relevant to the casework topics which have been assigned to them.

Whenever possible, provide information to a constituent or an agency in writing to reduce the chance for misunderstanding. A set of basic casework letters and forms is included to get you started.

There is no practical way to make a casework training manual all-encompassing. Casework priorities are different from district-to-district, depending on demographics, geography, economy, and culture. However, we think this manual presents a good overview of the major topics and we hope you will find it useful.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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AN INTRODUCTION TO CASEWORK

Most people think of Members of Congress as lawmakers, first and foremost. But equally important is the help that Congressional offices give to constituents who have problems with federal departments and agencies.

A Congressional office is essentially the Customer Service Department for the federal government

Casework – or Constituent Service, as it is often called – is one of the most valuable functions of a Congressional office. It fills an important humanitarian need and gives the Member of Congress a direct line to the needs and concerns of his or her constituents.

You might think of it as the Customer Service Department for the federal government.

Each Member of Congress has several staff members, called *caseworkers*, who handle constituent service inquiries, typically in the District Offices. A *case* is the documentation of that problem, including everything from notes about conversations to copies of responses from federal agencies.

Cases will vary from call-to-call, from the routine to the complicated to the bizarre. However, the caseworker can follow some general principles which will apply to each case.

Identifying the real problem is not always an easy task. Get all the information you can without prying.

First, the caseworker should not try to judge the validity of a constituent's claim. Your duty is to record a constituent's concerns and contact the appropriate agency for action. There will be times when you will know that the constituent's case is hopeless. However, your job is to allow those most qualified to make that determination. The obligation of the caseworker, as the local arm of the Member, is to be helpful to all. Remember, your attitude reflects on the Member.

A caseworker must be able to identify the real problem to be effective. This can be a difficult task, as the constituent is not always certain of the problem himself. Gather as much information from the constituent as possible. Think of yourself as a newspaper reporter who must have all the facts before you can produce an article. You must develop a clear understanding of the situation.

A helpful tool is to ask the constituent what outcome he or she would like to see. If that outcome is impossible to achieve, look for alternate solutions and

make other recommendations. You should not give up on a case or deem it hopeless until you have exhausted all possibilities.

Begin work on a case immediately. Nothing is gained by procrastination.

Put yourself in the constituent's place and don't leave any stone unturned. If bad news is inevitable, try to have some good news to present along with the bad – but do not give false hope. Establishing a good rapport with the constituent can help make the bad

news easier to take.

Speed in looking for solutions is of the utmost importance. As soon as possible after the constituent has either called or written the office, follow-up with a letter from the Member of Congress expressing concern about the problem. While the case is in the working stage, keep the constituent informed of any progress by passing along correspondence from agencies you have contacted, translating information you have received from bureaucratese into English, and providing a chronology of what will happen next.

Most importantly, don't let cases sit in your filing cabinet or on your desk for long periods of time. Again, put yourself in the constituent's place: Remember the times that you have requested service – from a repairman, a waitress, or anywhere else – and your request was mishandled or delayed? If you do not give prompt, efficient service, the constituent may become frustrated and will begin to feel that the Member is not concerned about his or her problem.

If you become overloaded, notify your supervisor immediately. Your co-workers will be happy to chip in to help you get through the busy periods, and the constituents will be better served because of it.

THE AGENCY CONTACT

The caseworker's main task is to be a liaison between the constituent and the government. You will collect data, make inquiries on behalf of the constituent, and attempt – with the help of federal, state and local agencies – to resolve the problem. An important tool in this task is the Privacy Act authorization form (see *Privacy Act of 1974* later in this section). Without a signed consent form or letter from the constituent, federal (and some state) agencies are under no obligation to release information to you about the case. In fact, most will flatly refuse to be of service without it. Once you have a signed consent form or letter, you are free to make inquiries on behalf of the constituent. (A signed letter from the constituent to the congressman will usually serve in lieu of an authorization form.)

Avoid delays by making your inquiry to the appropriate office on the first try. Letters sent to the wrong office can take weeks to resurface.

Always get the name and phone number of any agency contact you speak with. You may need to follow-up.

In making your inquiries, be sure you know where to go for the answers you need. Government websites and the U.S. Government Manual are very helpful in outlining which agencies handle specific problems. Once you have determined the appropriate agency, make an inquiry and include the Privacy Act authorization form and correspondence you have received from the constituent. Bear in mind that it is not always appropriate to forward a constituent letter, especially if it contains inflammatory language. Use discretion.

Directing cases to an agency can be done by either letter, fax, telephone, and some agencies are now accepting inquiries by e-mail. When sending letters, be sure to restate the problem as you understand it, ask specific questions, request statutory or regulatory information, and set a time limit for the reply if possible. When communicating by telephone, be sure to keep detailed notes of the conversations, ***the name of the person you talked with, and the telephone number of your contact.***

Don't write like a bureaucrat. Be clear and get to the point.

While waiting for an agency response, keep the constituent informed of the status of the case. If you don't receive an agency response within a reasonable amount of time, contact the agency to determine the status of your inquiry and when you will receive a response. On the other hand, if an agency has been prompt and very helpful, a letter to the agency head is appropriate. Not only will this express your appreciation, it will also promote goodwill for future contacts.

Once you have received the information needed to respond to the constituent, write a response, bearing in mind some important principles. The letter should be short and to the point. It should be simple, not flowery. ***Your job is not to impress with your literary genius, but to be understandable.*** Don't write editorials; just communicate the facts with sincerity and strength. Know what you are talking about. When possible, use enclosures which might be helpful. And finally, ***don't give false hope. Tell it like it is.*** Constituents may not like the news they get, but they will appreciate the truth.

When all is said and done, give the Member the credit for good results. The constituent may know that you did the work, but everything the staff does is in the Member's name. Don't try to make constituents think the Member did the legwork in solving his or her particular case, but inform them that the Member is kept advised of constituent problems.

AND FINALLY...

• ***Don't make any promises*** about the resolution of the case. Many times, you

do not know the full story. Also, archaic or unfair government regulations may prevent a case from reaching a resolution that most of us would consider fair and just.

•***Don't get personally involved in a case.*** This may be one of your most difficult tasks. From the standpoint of human compassion, it is often tempting to pull out your pocketbook and give money to a constituent. However, you will quickly end up both emotionally and financially troubled, and a troubled caseworker is of little help to constituents.

It is better to ask a question than make a mistake.

•***Remember: Each constituent is entitled to your assistance,*** no matter how unusual the request. You will get some cases that are quite remarkable, be it the lady who believes that her in-laws are still holding the Lindbergh baby hostage, or the gentleman who believes his mind is being controlled by satellites. However, each case that comes from a constituent in your congressional district must be acted on in some fashion.

•Be an advocate for the constituent, but remember that ***the constituent has told you just one side of the story.*** Sometimes, important facts about the case are conveniently left out, such as the notice that was not returned until after the deadline.

•***Don't be afraid to ask questions.*** Whether it means calling on another professional to seek assistance on a case, or calling the constituent back to clarify some information that you didn't understand in your initial conversation, becoming an accomplished question-asker is an invaluable skill for a caseworker.

A lot of information has been covered in this section, but do not let it overwhelm you. The next few pages provide a step-by-step outline of the casework process that will hopefully answer some of your questions. But as always, experience is the best teacher.

REFERENCE MATERIAL TO GET NOW

Each federal agency has lots of useful resource guides and reference materials. You will collect these items as you go. However, there are a few indispensable items you need to obtain immediately:

- Congressional Liaison Contacts List
- U.S. Government Manual
- U.S. House of Representatives Telephone Directory
- Congressional Directory
- Guide to Congressional Research Service (CRS) Products
- Directory of agencies and officials for your state

A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

STEP 1: Obtain any pertinent information from the constituent (see page 1–7). If you are taking the information verbally, fill out a **Case Sheet** (see the *Forms* section). If the constituent has written a letter, you will probably not need to complete a Case Sheet.

STEP 2: Get proper authorization from the constituent if the case will involve the release of records or personal information from a governmental agency. Agencies cannot release information from a person's file without written permission. A letter from the constituent is usually sufficient authorization. However, if you took the case verbally or by e-mail, mail an **Authorization Form** (in the *Forms* section) to the constituent to be returned to you.

STEP 3: Contact the appropriate government agency to explain the problem and provide any relevant information or documentation. Send a letter to the constituent saying that you are looking into the situation.

STEP 4: Send an interim reply in the following instances:

- If an agency calls with or sends an interim response.
- If the agency has not responded in 30 days, call the agency or send a follow-up letter or e-mail. Let the constituent know you have followed-up.

STEP 5: When the final reply comes in, mail it to the constituent. (Keep the original with the case file and send a copy to the constituent.)

STEP 6: Attach all materials together and file the closed case. (See *Filing* for more information.)

THE PRIVACY ACT OF 1974

Public Law 93-579

(5 U.S.C. 552a)

The Federal Privacy Act was passed by Congress and signed into law in 1974. The purpose of the Privacy Act is to protect the individual rights of citizens by prohibiting the release of personal information about them to unauthorized parties. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) has an information packet available which explains the Privacy Act and the Freedom of Information Act. The text of these laws is provided along with background information on the Acts and how to use them.

The Privacy Act applies only to personal records maintained by the executive branch of the Federal Government concerning individual citizens. It does not apply to records held by state and local governments or private organizations. Most states have similar restrictions, however.

It is important that constituents provide written consent for the Congressman to assist them with problems with the federal government that would include an inquiry about personal information contained in a Federal agency file, such as Social Security claims, DVA claims, etc.

The written consent can be in the form of a letter signed by the constituent. If the contact is by telephone or in person, have the constituent sign a Privacy Act form (authorization form). This form is generally kept in the office with the constituent's file in the event there is ever any question about information being released to the Congressman. Many agencies require a completed authorization form before they will release information.

A sample Authorization Form is included in the Forms section of this manual.

GUIDELINES

1. In personal or telephone interviews, get name (verify spelling), address and telephone number. If required, get Social Security number, plus all other pertinent information.

2. Inquire about action the constituent may have already taken. It's helpful to develop a time line, listing previous actions in chronological order.

3. Remember: Unless you have a letter requesting help in hand, you must get an Authorization Form completed if the case requires information from a person's records.

4. **Never guarantee or promise anything.** Because you cannot force an agency of government to render a favorable decision, you should not create any expectation on the part of the constituent.

5. If it becomes obvious during an interview that you are not the appropriate person to handle the case, let the constituent know that early on. If the appropriate person is not in the office at the time, you should make the constituent aware of the situation and offer to personally see that the case gets into the right hands.

6. Develop your congressional liaison contacts and maintain them.

7. Make sure the constituent has made application or filed for an appeal before you make an inquiry.

8. Never second-guess or assume anything. If you have questions, ask.

9. Acknowledge receipt of constituent letters and phone calls immediately. Remember: personal calls are great, but they should never be a substitute for a letter from the Member.

10. The constituent should be given periodic status reports on the case. Even

INFORMATION TO GET FROM CONSTITUENTS

It is better to get too much information than too little. Each topic in this manual gives specific advice on the information you will need, but following are the basics:

1. Name (Avoid embarrassment – verify spelling!!!)
2. Mailing address
3. Telephone number
4. Social Security number, Case Number, or File Number (if needed)
5. All other details pertinent to the case, including dates, places, and contacts already made. If necessary, make sure the constituent has made an application or filed for an appeal before you make an inquiry on his or her behalf.

if you have nothing to report, reassure the constituent that the Congressman has not put the case on the “back burner.”

11. If you do not know something about a particular request or problem, do not hesitate to let the constituent know that you will need to do some research.
12. The case sheet should be easily accessible and **coherent** to anyone finding himself in a pinch-hitting role in your absence. Make sure your case file contains all information, including enclosures, that you send to the constituent.
13. Notify the constituent promptly of responses to your inquiry, whether favorable or unfavorable. If suggestions or alternatives are available, don't hesitate to make them.
14. Don't forget to thank agency personnel for exemplary work. A complimentary letter to the person's supervisor can be helpful in creating goodwill for the future.

FILING

A good filing system is the foundation for a successful casework operation. Although the topic of filing is rather mundane, failure to establish rules and procedures early will cause chaos down the road. That's a promise.

A good filing system is vital to a successful casework operation.

The concept of a paperless office is all well and good, but unfortunately it does not have much practical application for a casework operation. In dealing with a constituent's forms and documents, keeping a paper file is unavoidable.

OPEN CASES

Due to the large volume of cases that a Congressional Office handles, it is absolutely essential that each caseworker keep his or her case files organized and up-to-date. Failure to do this will, at best, result in the wrath of your fellow employees or, at worst, the unemployment line.

To avoid having that annual beach trip ruined by frequent phone calls from the office, follow these guidelines:

1. Never, never, never, never write information on incoming cases on scrap paper, phone message slips, or the back of your hand. Keep a ready supply of blank case sheets in your top desk drawer, and pull one out immediately when a call comes in or a constituent comes by.

2. Organize the case as follows:

- Begin on the **bottom** of the stack with the Case Sheet or original letter from the constituent and any supporting documentation.
- Build upward with any correspondence sent from the Congressional office, agency responses, and records of telephone activity.
- The latest action taken on the case should be on top at all times. Usually, the most recent letter sent to the constituent will be the latest action, and will be on top of the stack. Also, it is helpful to staple the case together rather than using paper clips, because paper clips often catch on each other and documentation from one case may end up attached to another.

- The case should be closed with a letter to the constituent, and that letter should be placed on top of the case file prior to placing it with other closed files.

You can never predict when you may be absent from work unexpectedly. Keep your files organized so that co-workers can take over for you.

3. *File cases in such a way that co-workers can locate them and determine their status in your absence.* Constituents do not always call on schedule, and action

may need to be taken when you are out with the Congressman, on vacation, sick, etc. Generally, caseworkers keep open cases at their desk, filed either alphabetically or by topic.

CLOSED CASES

You will often need to refer to closed case files, and you must be able to locate them quickly. It is usually best to file closed cases centrally in the office. A good system is to create a set of folders with the category names on them, and then file the individual cases alphabetically inside each folder. At the end of each year, close out the folders for that year and begin with empty folders for the new year. A computer listing of open and closed cases is also very helpful.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE INTERNET...

The Internet has become an indispensable tool for caseworkers. Forms, publications, and other material that used to take weeks to obtain can now be printed out directly from agency websites. Take the time to familiarize yourself with the websites of the agencies whose categories you handle. Also, several excellent resources are linked from the House of Representatives intranet site at <http://housenet.house.gov/>.

A few agencies have implemented systems to respond to congressional inquiries via e-mail, but most have not because of issues relating to the Privacy Act. Hopefully, more agencies will embrace e-mail in the near future.

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ACADEMY NOMINATIONS & APPOINTMENTS

Members of Congress nominate local students to attend the prestigious Air Force, Military, Naval, and Merchant Marine academies.

A service academy is an academy, or college, that is run by the federal government to train officers of the Armed Forces. There are a total of five federal service academies, three under the jurisdiction of the Department of Defense (DoD) and two under the Department of Transportation (DOT).

The DoD operates the United States Air Force, Military, and Naval Academies and the DOT operates the Merchant Marine and Coast Guard Academies. Congressional nominations are usually necessary for a person to enter any academy except the Coast Guard Academy. The Coast Guard Academy deals directly with interested persons.

NOMINATIONS

Nominations are the *recommendations* made by the Congressman to each academy. A nomination is not an appointment, and you will probably make many more nominations than there are slots (vacancies) available. The Congressman may nominate up to 10 candidates for each slot. Each representative may have a maximum of five cadets or midshipmen at each DoD service academy at one time. The Merchant Marine Academy has a quota for each state, and each representative may nominate up to 10 candidates per year. North Carolina's quota is six.

You must be careful of how many vacancies you fill each year. You always want to make sure you will have at least one vacancy at each academy for the next year. (For example, you may have three vacancies open for a particular nominating year, yet you may choose to only use one of those so that you would have a vacancy for the next year, and one for the next.)

TYPES OF NOMINATIONS

There are three methods of nomination: competitive, principal with competing alternates, and principal with numbered alternates.

The *competitive* method is the most commonly used nomination method. Under this method, the Congressman submits an unranked slate of nominees to the academy. The appointment (offer of admission) is offered to the candidate the academy chooses as the best qualified.

In the *principal with competing alternates method*, the Congressman designates one person to whom they wish the appointment offered, then leaves the rest of

ACADEMIES - CONTINUED

the slate for the academy to rank in order of qualification. If the principal nominee is qualified, he or she will be offered the appointment. If the principal nominee does not qualify, or for some reason refuses the appointment, the alternates compete for the vacancy.

In the *principal with numbered alternates method*, a principal nominee is named, as explained above. The other candidates on the slate are then ranked in order of preference by the Congressman. In effect, the highest ranked candidate to be qualified will be offered the appointment.

As discussed earlier, the competitive method is preferred by most Congressmen because it assures the appointment of the most qualified candidate and it prevents the Congressman from ranking one constituent over another.

REQUIREMENTS

To be considered for an academy appointment, an applicant must first be nominated. United States Senators and members of the House of Representatives may nominate applicants who meet the eligibility requirements established by law.

The following requirements must be met by all applicants as of July 1 of the year of admission:

- The applicant must be at least 17 years of age, but not have passed his or her 23rd birthday (25th birthday for Merchant Marine Academy).
- He or she must be a United States citizen.
- The applicant must be unmarried, not pregnant, and have no legal obligation to support children or other dependents.

Once nominated, the respective academies will determine if the individual meets the additional specific requirements necessary for appointment.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Each Senator and Congressman develops his or her own application for nomination and sets the deadline for receiving the completed applications. Most offices set a day in October or early November as the deadline for accepting applications. This usually leaves adequate time for the completed applications to be considered and all nominations made to the academies by the January 31 deadline.

•***Opening a nomination file on an individual:*** Persons interested in a nomination should contact their Congressman and/or Senator's office in writing. If a friend or relative of a prospective nominee contacts the office on his

or her behalf, write down the appropriate information, but explain that a letter must be received from the prospective nominee before a file can be opened. Once a letter from the prospective nominee is received, forward the application and other information.

A candidate may only be nominated by the Congressman representing the district in which he or she legally resides.

CONTACTS & RESOURCE MATERIALS

Congressional Guide for Admission to the United States Service Academies

This publication is available from any of the academies, and Congressional liaison contacts for each academy are listed therein.

WEBSITES

US Air Force Academy website: www.usafa.edu

US Military Academy website: www.usma.edu

US Naval Academy website: www.usna.edu

US Coast Guard Academy website: www.cga.edu

US Merchant Marine Academy website: www.usmma.edu

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

The ADA is a federal law that promotes access to buildings, transportation, and services for people with disabilities. It is primarily enforced by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) addresses barriers to employment, transportation, public accommodations, public services, and telecommunications for individuals with disabilities.

Most often, constituents will ask for your assistance in determining if a particular action is in compliance with ADA, if he or she is subject to ADA, how to file an ADA complaint, or to check the status of an ADA complaint. Many ADA complaints involve private litigation rather than administrative action by an executive agency. Therefore, the majority of the requests you will receive will simply be for information.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Constituent's name, address and phone number.
2. A signed authorization form (when an inquiry on a complaint pending with an executive agency is necessary).
3. A detailed case sheet outlining the constituent's questions and concerns.

CONTACTS

For information on ADA requirements affecting public services and accommodations, contact:

Office on the Americans With Disabilities Act
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
P.O. Box 66118
Washington, DC 20035-6118
Phone: 202/514-0301
Phone: 202/514-0381 - **Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD)**
website: www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/agency.htm

For information about ADA requirements affecting employment, contact:

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Office of Congressional Liaison
1801 L St., NW
Washington, DC 20507

Phone: 202/663-4900
Phone: 1-800-800-3302 **(TDD)**
Phone: 202/663-4494 **(TDD)**
website: www.eeoc.gov

For information about ADA requirements affecting transportation, contact:

U.S. Department of Transportation
400 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20590
Phone: 202/366-4000
Phone: 202/755-7687 **(TDD)**
website: www.dot.gov

For information about ADA requirements for accessible design in new construction and alterations, contact:

Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board
1111 18th Street NW, Suite 501
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 1-800-USA-ABLE (1-800-872-2253) **(TDD and Voice)**

For information about ADA requirements affecting telecommunications, contact:

Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street NW
Washington, DC 20554
Phone: 202/418-1324
website: www.fcc.gov/cib/dro/

If a local office for one of the above agencies is located in your state or district, it will probably be a better and more convenient source for information.

AGRICULTURE & FARM SERVICE AGENCY

In addition to farm programs, the USDA also handles food stamps, some housing programs, rural development, and the U.S. Forest Service.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is a very large agency with broad responsibilities. This section will address programs which deal with farming, although USDA also has programs for housing (see the *HUD/Housing* section of this book), rural development (see *Rural Development* section) and governs Food Stamps (see *Social Programs*) and the U.S. Forest Service (see *Interior/National Forests*).

Farm programs are administered by a branch of USDA known as the Farm Service Agency (FSA). The name change is recent; it was long called the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), and many constituents may continue to refer to it that way.

For decades, Farm Service Agency offices were located in just about every county or parish with any agricultural activity. In recent years, much consolidation has taken place, but there is still a Farm Service office within easy driving distance of most areas.

Farm programs under the jurisdiction of the FSA are as follows:

COMMODITY LOAN PROGRAMS

Current commodity loan programs cover wheat, rice, corn, grain sorghum, barley, oats, oilseeds, honey, wool, mohair, peanuts, upland and extra-long-staple cotton, and sugar. Typically, a farmer will harvest and store production so he can sell it at a time of year when the price is more favorable. He can then take out a short-term loan, using the crops as collateral, and be able to cover expenses until the crops are sold. He can also discharge the debt by turning the crop over to the government. This is all done through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), which is run by USDA.

COMMODITY PURCHASE PROGRAMS

To help maintain market price stability, the CCC purchases surplus cheese, butter, and nonfat dry milk.

CROP INSURANCE

Federally subsidized crop insurance is available for many different crops, and is available from private insurance agents throughout the country. Federal crop insurance programs are regulated by the Risk Management Agency, which has offices around the country.

AGRICULTURE - CONTINUED

FARM LOANS

FSA offers direct and guaranteed farm ownership and operating loans to farmers who cannot obtain loans from conventional sources.

CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

FSA works in conjunction with another USDA agency, the **Natural Resources Conservation Service**, to implement programs to control erosion and provide protection for environmentally sensitive acreage.

DISASTER PROGRAMS

A basic level of disaster assistance is available through FSA, known as the Noninsured Disaster Assistance Program (NAP). Information on FSA disaster assistance can be found online at <http://disaster.fsa.usda.gov/fsa.asp>. Congress also regularly enacts annual crop disaster programs which provide assistance for crop losses as a result of natural disasters. The local FSA office is the point of contact for these programs.

PUBLICATIONS

The USDA publishes a wide array of material relating to all aspects of agriculture. Constituents may call to request certain publications, which you can acquire from the USDA Publications Division at 202/720-3365 or, in many cases, download from the internet.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Constituent's name, address and phone number.
2. A signed authorization form (when an inquiry requiring release of records from an executive agency is necessary).
3. A detailed case sheet outlining the constituent's questions and concerns.

CONTACTS

The first contact will most often be the local Farm Service Agency office. You can also contact the USDA congressional liaison office.

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Congressional Liaison Office
Room 213-A
14th and Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250
Phone: 202/720-7095
website: www.usda.gov

BANKRUPTCY

Bankruptcy laws and regulations are primarily under the jurisdiction of the federal government. You will be dealing with both ends of the equation, but mainly with creditors.

In handling Bankruptcy casework, you will primarily deal with questions and concerns from employees and other creditors of companies that have filed for protection under the federal bankruptcy code. It can take up to five years to resolve a business-related bankruptcy. Since the liquidation and distribution of assets through a bankruptcy procedure is a complicated and lengthy process, creditors often become confused or frustrated. They often contact the congressional office when this happens.

You may be asked a wide variety of questions regarding bankruptcies. You will find that some questions fall within the Congressman's jurisdiction and can be referred to federal agencies. However, other questions will relate to the bankruptcy trustee (a court-appointed caretaker of the business) and, as such, require more informal inquiries. It is helpful to maintain a good working relationship with the trustee. This section will provide you with an overview of the most common topics you may have to address. A comprehensive and regularly updated review of these issues is also available at the following website: www.dol.gov/ebsa/Newsroom/fsbankruptcy.html

WAGES

Employees due overtime pay or back wages from a company that has filed for bankruptcy protection are considered creditors. Generally, back wages are given top priority in the distribution of liquidated assets.

To get their names on the list as creditors in the bankruptcy, employees should file "Proof of Claim Forms" with the bankruptcy court handling the case. The forms may be obtained from the clerk of the bankruptcy court.

If an employee has filed a claim form with the court and feels it has been handled improperly, you will need to contact the bankruptcy court and the trustee. If a satisfactory answer cannot be secured from these sources, you may contact the U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division. Depending on the circumstances, the Wage and Hour office may be able to follow-up with the court to make sure the claim is being properly processed.

INSURANCE

If the bankrupt company has a group health insurance plan for its employees, employees may encounter problems getting claims that are filed on the policy

BANKRUPTCY - CONTINUED

approved. If this occurs, your first contact should be with your state's Department of Insurance.

PENSIONS

In the event the employer is delinquent in paying policy premiums or has a self-insured policy which is bereft of funds, employees will have to file creditor claims with the bankruptcy court to secure coverage or premium refunds.

Pension plans are not considered company assets that can be liquidated. Consequently, employees can be assured their pension funds are safe. However, when a company shuts down, the pension plan is closed and contributions are stopped.

The closing of the plan and distribution of benefits to employees are handled by a financial institution under the supervision of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and U.S. Department of Labor. This is also a time-consuming process; it may take several months for employees to start receiving their benefits. Questions concerning this subject should be directed to Department of Labor's Employee Benefits Security Administration.

FEDERAL TAX WITHHOLDING

If a company files Chapter 11 bankruptcy and closes quickly, many employees may not receive W-2 forms for that year. Employees may obtain substitute W-2 forms from the IRS.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Constituent's name, address, phone number and social security number.
2. Signed authorization form.
3. Name of company filing for bankruptcy.
4. Chapter of bankruptcy being filed, date it was filed, location of court where the petition was filed, name and location of the trustee, and case number.
5. A case sheet outlining the constituent's problem in detail.
6. When applicable, the name of the financial institution handling the pension plan closure.

CONTACTS

The court and trustee contacts will vary with each individual case. Inquiries to the Department of Labor regarding back wages should be directed to the Wage and Hour office located nearest to you. You can obtain contact information for the appropriate office from Department of Labor headquarters or the agency website.

U.S. Department of Labor
Room S-2018
200 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20210
Phone: 202/693-4600
website: www.dol.gov/esa/whd/

Inquiries concerning group insurance coverage and pension plans should also be directed to the EBSA.

U.S. Department of Labor
Room S-2018
200 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20210
Phone: 202/693-4600
Public Phone: 1-866-444-EBSA (3272)
website: www.dol.gov/ebsa
website (good reference for constituents): www.askebsa.dol.gov

Inquiries concerning federal income tax withholding should be directed to the Internal Revenue Service. You can obtain contact information for the appropriate office from IRS headquarters or the agency website. Also see the Internal Revenue Service section of this manual for additional contact information.

Internal Revenue Service
Room 3241
1111 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20224

BIRTHDAY AND ANNIVERSARY GREETINGS

You can have birthday, anniversary, and other messages sent to constituents from both the President and the Congressman. Certain limits apply to Presidential greetings.

Members of Congress can request that the President send birthday, anniversary, and other cards and letters to constituents. Often, the constituents will also ask for cards or letters from the Congressman.

PRESIDENTIAL GREETINGS

For birthday greetings, the recipient can get a special card at 13 years, 21 years, 50 years, and 80 years or older. A special letter can be sent to constituents 100 years and older. For anniversary greetings, the couple must be celebrating their 50th anniversary or higher.

Also available are new baby cards addressed to the parents; a condolence card addressed to the immediate family member; Eagle Scout award and Girl Scout Gold award letters; and high school and college graduation acknowledgements.

These requests should be submitted three weeks prior to the date the message is needed, but they can be requested at any time, even though they may arrive late in some cases. Each office should decide whether such requests will be handled out of the Washington office or the District office. If they are handled in the Washington office, and the event is within 30 days, fax or e-mail the information to speed processing.

CONGRESSIONAL GREETINGS

There is no age limitation on Congressional greetings. However, these greetings may not be sent in franked envelopes. Congressional greetings may be sent from either the Washington or District office. If the Washington office handles Presidential greetings, but the Congressional letter will be sent from the district office, note that on the request for Presidential greetings to prevent duplication.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Name, address, and phone number of person requesting the greeting.
2. Name(s), proper salutation, and other relevant information about person(s) to receive greeting.
3. Address of recipient, and address that greeting is to be mailed (caller may request greeting to be sent to them to be presented at a party, etc.).
4. Date of birthday or anniversary.
5. Age or which anniversary is being celebrated.

CONTACTS

Greetings Office
Old Executive Office Building, Room 39
Washington, DC 20500
Phone: 202/456-5451
Fax: 202/395-1232

CHILD SUPPORT

Child Support is primarily a state-operated program, but federal involvement has increased in recent years. Still, in most cases, these are cases best left to state or local officials.

Problems involving Child Support will be among the most difficult you will encounter. Since this is primarily a state-administered program – and there is little federal jurisdiction (with the exception of IRS Intercept which will be discussed below) – you may want to avoid this category altogether. You can offer to get information from a state agency on the constituent's behalf, but Child Support is generally a legal matter to be settled in the courts.

Depending on the case, Child Support can be a simple agreement between parents, or it can result from a court order and be enforced by either court officials or a Social Services agency.

COURT ORDERED CHILD SUPPORT

This is a decision made by a judge when parents are involved in a separation or divorce and they have a minor child or children. Become familiar with your state's laws regarding child support enforcement. You can offer to contact the proper agency concerning the status of a child support case.

WAGE WITHHOLDING

Courts can order that a certain portion of a parent's wages be withheld to pay overdue child support or to make sure that someone with a spotty payment history will meet his or her court-ordered child support obligation. The proper forms are sent to the employer of the parent and the child support is deducted from the employee's wages. It is then sent to the court administrator by the employer. (Determine what your state's regulation is concerning wage withholding for child support payments).

IRS INTERCEPT

The state can ask the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to attach any income tax refund due to the obligated parent. This money, less any amount that may be owed to the state for previously received welfare assistance, will then be sent to the dependent children to help offset payments that are past due.

As in all cases under state jurisdiction, you can contact the appropriate state official and ask if he or she will call the constituent. Give the state official general information about the problem. Note on your case sheet that it was referred to the state, send a letter to the constituent, and close the case. The state official may offer to send you a copy of the agency's response.

PASSPORT NON-ISSUANCE

Under federal law, Passports will not be issued to parents who are behind in their child support payments.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Current name and address of the mother (may be remarried) or father, phone number, and Social Security number.
2. Full name and address, if known, of the father.
3. Place of employment of the father, or last known place of employment.
4. Amount past due, if applicable.
5. Names, dates of birth, Social Security number, and addresses of children receiving child support.
6. Name of county or parish where the court order was made.
7. Name of the caseworker with the county Department of Social Services.

CONTACTS

Your first contact should be with the caseworker with the appropriate Social Services agency to verify the information given to you by the constituent. If you have a question about how a case is being handled, it may be best to contact the appropriate state government agency for a clarification. The state government official will usually look into the matter and get back with you.

COMMERCE

The U.S. Department of Commerce is a low-profile agency that generates very little casework. However, agencies within the department provide important services.

Most constituents have little direct contact with the U.S. Department of Commerce, but the DOC includes several agencies that can be especially helpful.

• **Bureau of the Census:** As directed by the Constitution, the Bureau of the Census conducts a count of our nation's residents every 10 years. The data collected can be especially helpful to both government and businesses, and can be obtained on request. Much of this information is available online.

• **International Trade Administration:** The International Trade Administration (ITA), with regional offices throughout the country, can assist businesses with most questions or problems involving importing and exporting. ITA can resolve minor trade disputes and can assist businesses in locating overseas markets for their products. A list of ITA offices can be found at the agency's website: www.ita.doc.gov.

• **Economic Development Administration:** The Economic Development Administration (EDA) has become a much more high profile agency in recent years. EDA offers grant and technical assistance programs that are quite helpful to regions undergoing economic hardship.

Other agencies that you may have casework with are the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; the Minority Business Development Agency; the National Institute of Standards and Technology; and the Patent and Trademark Office (see *Copyright and Patent Information* in Section 2 of this manual.)

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Completed case sheet.
2. A thorough description of the problem, including documentation.

CONTACTS

U.S. Department of Commerce
Office of Congressional Affairs
Room 5421
14th and Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

Phone: 202/482-3663
website: www.commerce.gov

Bureau of the Census
Congressional Liaison Office
Room 2077, F.O.B. #3
Washington, DC 20233
Phone: 301/457-2171
website: www.census.gov

Economic Development Administration
Office of Legislative Affairs
Room 7800
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230
Phone: 202/482-4067
website: www.eda.gov

COPYRIGHT AND PATENT INFORMATION

Copyrights protect written works and are handled by the Library of Congress. Patents are for inventions or designs and are handled by the Department of Commerce.

Constituents often contact their Congressman to secure information about how to obtain a copyright or patent. Copyrights protect written works, while patents protect products or designs. Copyrights are handled by the Library of Congress and patents and trademarks are handled by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

You can address these inquiries by referring constituents to the appropriate office or by requesting the information the constituent needs from the appropriate officials.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Constituent's name, address and phone number.
2. For copyrights, determine if one is needed for a book, musical score or another printed work.
3. For a patent, determine if one is needed for a machine, a manufacturing process or something else.

CONTACTS

Copyright Office
Library of Congress
Washington, DC 20559
Phone: 202/707-6800
website: www.copyright.gov

Patent & Trademark Office
Department of Commerce
Box 4
Washington, DC 20231
Phone: 703/305-9310
Phone number for constituents: 1-800-786-9199
website: www.uspto.gov

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3

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EDUCATION

Most often, education casework involves defaulted student loans. You will also receive inquiries from students searching for loans and from parents with a gripe.

Problems involving education usually concern student loans that are delinquent. Federally funded student loans in most cases are not payable until the student has graduated from college, unless he or she drops out or fails to follow the proper procedures for deferment while remaining a full-time student.

DEFAULTED STUDENT LOANS

This is a category that should be handled with considerable care and attention. Many constituents have failed to meet the obligations of repayment and their loans are in default. You will be given many reasons why payments were not made according to the terms of the loan contract. Make notes on your case sheet accordingly, but refrain from drawing a conclusion until you have contacted the appropriate office in the U.S. Department of Education.

Request copies of all pertinent documentation from the constituent. If the constituent does not have the original loan documents, ask for copies of notices recently received from the Department of Education so you can obtain the account number. Once a federal student loan has gone into default, it is often sent to a collection agency which has been contracted by the Department of Education to collect delinquent loans. Large penalties and interest charges are added to the loan principle.

However, keep in mind that federal regulations require that the person responsible for the balance on the defaulted loan must be offered an affordable repayment plan. The constituent must provide the collection agency with a written financial statement and include a proposed monthly payment amount. The agency will determine if the proposed monthly payment amount is a fair offer.

In certain cases, a student loan account will be assigned to a collection agency either prematurely or in error. Although it is difficult to have the account taken back by the Department of Education, it can be done. You may have to be persistent.

Occasionally, a person will receive a collection notice even though he or she never obtained a student loan. This can result from an error as simple as a transposed digit in a Social Security number. The Congressional Liaison office at the Department of Education can resolve such cases with proper documentation.

EDUCATION - CONTINUED

Finally, some student loans end up in default even though the constituent has made an effort to make repayment arrangements. If this happens, hopefully the constituent will have documented his or her contacts. Write to the U.S. Department of Education and include copies of this information and request that the loan be retrieved from defaulted status.

DELINQUENT LOANS

A constituent may contact you after receiving notification that he or she owes a large amount of money for a student loan, and the lender is demanding full payment. You can make an inquiry to determine the exact status of the loan and ensure that the constituent is being treated fairly. Include in your inquiry copies of documents you have received from the constituent.

STUDENT LOAN APPLICATIONS

If a student wants information about applying for financial assistance, advise the student to contact the Financial Aid office of the college of his or her choice. The office will explain the programs available and assist in the application process. This is the student's best source of information, as many programs vary from college to college. There are also many foundation and corporate scholarships available. Public libraries are a good source of information about such programs.

If a student fails to qualify for a student loan, determine from the constituent the reason for the denial. Most often, it is because of combined family income or credit problems. You can make an inquiry to the U.S. Department of Education for information. Be sure to obtain a signed authorization form.

DISPUTES WITH SCHOOL

There is generally no federal jurisdiction in disputes between a student and a school. Constituents must work with school or local officials to resolve such matters.

LEADERSHIP CONFERENCES

You might receive calls from parents saying their child was selected to attend a leadership conference in Washington, D.C. The cost varies. The parents are requesting funding assistance because they cannot afford to send their child. *These are not government sponsored programs.* Therefore, there are no scholarships available through federal sources. Suggest ways that a student can raise funds through private sources such as civic clubs, churches, car washes, etc. These conferences are usually arranged by credible organizations and can be of great benefit to the students.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Name and address as it appears on loan application or delinquent notice.
2. Copies of all paperwork relating to the loan.
3. Signed Authorization Form

CONTACTS

U. S. Department of Education
Libby Upshur, Congressional Affairs Specialist
Room 3153, FOB-6
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202
202/401-1028
website: www.ed.gov

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental problems can range from pollution issues involving air, groundwater, and land to compliance questions from businesses. Some states run their own programs.

The increased environmental awareness of the American public has led to an ever-growing number of calls, visits, and letters to congressional offices about environmental matters. Inquiries and complaints may include topics such as air and water pollution, hazardous waste, and environmental law.

Many states have environmental agencies of their own which are authorized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to enforce federal regulations. If that is the case with your state, you may want to direct your initial inquiry to the appropriate state agency. Otherwise, contact the nearest EPA regional office.

You can also contact the EPA directly with questions about federal regulations or projects, or if the constituent feels that state officials are not properly enforcing environmental regulations.

The EPA is also in charge of the National Priorities List, or **Superfund**. This program is the result of legislation passed by the U.S. Congress to clean up sites that have been contaminated by hazardous substances. Often, companies that have shipped waste to the site or were former owners or tenants are required to pay part of the cost of the clean-up operation. This procedure may raise some questions from the Principal Responsible Parties (PRP's), as they are called.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Completed case sheet.
2. A thorough description of the problem, including documentation.

CONTACTS

The appropriate state environmental agency or the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Contact the EPA Congressional Liaison office in Washington for the location of the EPA regional office with jurisdiction over your state.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Congressional Liaison Office
Ariel Rios Bldg. North, Room 3426
1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20460
Phone: 202/564-5200
website: www.epa.gov

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

When employees charge discrimination, the EEOC is where they file their complaints. Involvement of a Congressional office is very limited in these cases.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is a federal agency that handles complaints from employees who feel they have been discriminated against by their employers. Constituents contacting their Congressman regarding this agency usually want to know how to file a discrimination complaint.

A congressional office's involvement in an EEOC case is usually limited to referring the constituent to the appropriate EEOC office. However, it may be necessary to check the status of a case on occasion.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Constituent's name, address and phone number.
2. Constituent's EEOC charge number, if he or she has an active case pending.
3. A signed Authorization Form (when an inquiry is necessary).
4. A detailed case sheet outlining the constituent's questions and concerns or a letter from the constituent.

CONTACTS

The EEOC congressional liaison unit is located in Washington. This office can provide you with the location of the regional office that serves your area.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Office of Congressional Liaison
1801 L Street NW
Washington, DC 20507
Phone: 202/663-4900
Fax: 202/663-4912
website: www.eeoc.gov

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

The FCC has jurisdiction over mass communication. The agency is often very slow to respond to routine inquiries. Often, a state consumer affairs agency is a better alternative.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates all forms of mass communication, from television to radio to telephones.

Constituents may call if they are having difficulty in resolving problems with cable television service, are experiencing interference because of a neighbor's Citizens Band or Ham Radio broadcasts, or have a dispute with the telephone company.

CABLE TV PROBLEMS

When dealing with cable television problems, keep in mind that cable television franchises are awarded, in most cases, by local governmental bodies. The franchise agreements usually contain specific service standards, and local governmental officials are often a good first contact in helping to resolve any difficulties.

Cable TV regulations enforced by the FCC have to do with service standards and availability and price of basic cable television service. The FCC does not regulate pricing for expanded and premium services.

TELEPHONE ISSUES

Telephone complaints often involve disputed charges on a phone bill. Depending on the nature of the complaint, a state consumer affairs or public utilities agency will often provide faster assistance than the FCC.

In recent years, the practice of "slamming" by long distance phone companies has generated much casework. This term refers to the unauthorized switching of a person's long distance service from one company to another. Again, a state agency might be able to resolve the problem faster, but the FCC does offer assistance, albeit quite slowly. The FCC website has several publications that can offer guidance in resolving phone-related issues.

OTHER ISSUES

Other issues becoming more prominent are broadband access, digital television, and the national Do Not Call registry. The FCC maintains this registry, and constituents can place their phone number on the list so that telemarketers will no longer call them. Fact sheets on these and other issues are available on the FCC website.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Completed case sheet.
2. A thorough description of the problem, including the suspected origin of any broadcasts that are causing interference.
3. Any documentation, such as telephone bills.

CONTACTS

Federal Communications Commission
Office of Congressional and Public Affairs
445 12th Street SW, Room 8-C432
Washington, DC 20554
Phone: 202/418-1900
website: www.fcc.gov

FLAG REQUESTS

You can have flags flown over the U.S. Capitol to present to constituents. Most offices charge for this service. Be careful not to become a wholesale outlet.

Constituents can obtain from the Congressman a United States flag that has been flown over the U.S. Capitol. With sufficient advance notice, many times the flag can be flown on a specific date to commemorate a special occasion.

Although procedures differ from office to office, most offices now require constituents to purchase flags due to the large number of requests. Also, the extremely low prices can provide unfair competition with local retail merchants; for that reason, it is also a good idea to prohibit the sale of flags that have not been flown.

PROCEDURE

Complete a Flag Request Form. Give the constituent the current price (check with your Washington office), and ask them to mail or bring a check to the office. No request should be processed without payment attached. All requests must be paid by check or money order, made out to your Congressman's Office Supply Account.

After payment is received, attach it to the Flag Request Form and send it to the Washington Office. Keep a copy of the form for the district file. If the flag is needed within 30 days, fax or e-mail the information to the Washington office. Remember: the Washington office cannot mail the flag to the constituent until payment is received.

Each flag is sent with a certificate containing the recipient's name and the date the flag was flown. The following is a list of wording that can be used on the flag certificate:

- flown for
- presented to
- in recognition of
- in memory of
- in commemoration of

Due to the number of requests that the flag office receives, it may take several weeks to receive the flag after it has flown over the Capitol.

A Flag Request Form is contained in the *Forms* section of this manual. Prices

FLAG REQUESTS- CONTINUED

change from time to time, and your Washington office should provide you with the current prices on a regular basis. Write the current prices in the blanks provided on the Flag Request Form, and update them as needed.

STATE FLAGS

State flags are not available through a Congressional office. If they cannot be purchased locally, state elected officials are usually a good source.

GSA / GOVERNMENT AUCTIONS

The General Services Administration oversees and purchases most government buildings and equipment. Several agencies dispose of property by auction.

The General Services Administration is in charge of most of the buildings, property, and equipment used by the agencies of the federal government. Hence, the GSA is a major purchaser of equipment and furnishings, and companies may contact the congressional office for information or assistance in becoming suppliers.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

The GSA is divided into regions that cover different parts of the country, and each region generally contracts for government offices in its area only. It is usually best to put the interested party directly in touch with the GSA regional office. Many other government agencies also procure products and services from the private sector. The U.S. Small Business Administration is a good source of information and assistance in helping companies get started with government contracting (see *Small Business Administration* in section seven of this manual.)

AUCTIONS

Surplus or outdated furnishings, vehicles, and equipment are sold at auctions that are periodically conducted by various federal agencies. Some of these sales are conducted online. The best source for information on the various auctions is the following website:

<http://www.firstgov.com/shopping/shopping.shtml>

CONTACTS

Contact the GSA Congressional Liaison office in Washington for information on the regional GSA office that serves your state.

General Services Administration
Congressional Liaison Office
Room 6105
1800 F Street NW
Washington, DC 20405
Phone: 202/501-1250
website: www.gsa.gov

GRANTS

The federal government administers thousands of grant programs. Few of these grants are available to individuals. Many are funnelled through state agencies.

Individuals, corporations, government entities, and non-profit organizations often seek the Congressman's help regarding available grant monies. Their goals are usually two-fold:

- 1) Identify possible sources of government grant money; and
- 2) Request the Congressman's support for securing government funds.

Constituents need to be reminded that government funding sources may be somewhat limited. However, there are state, local and private funding resources that should be investigated as well.

It is important to note that, in certain cases, funds are appropriated at the federal level, but administered at the state level. State agencies often distribute the monies. This practice has expanded in recent years and will continue to do so most likely.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Congressional staffers engaged in grants casework should study Congressional Research Service (CRS) report 97-220 C, "Grants Work in a Congressional Office" and CRS Info Pack IP 50G, "Grants and Foundation Support: Information about Private and Government Funding." Both of these are available through the CRS website at www.loc.gov/crs/.

Staffers also should familiarize themselves with the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, a detailed compilation of federal government grant programs, the Federal Register, which often provides updated information on federal government funding programs, and the Foundation Directory, which provides information on private funding. Congressional offices have access to this information and much, much more through online sources.

Perhaps the best source of information about government funding programs is the Congressional Liaison contact for the federal government department or agency offering a specific program. In addition, the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) provides the name, address, and telephone number of an agency contact, often from a regional or local office of the sponsoring department or agency, who can provide excellent information about the current availability of funds, any pre-application requirements, sources of assistance in the

GRANTS - CONTINUED

preparation of applications, the anticipated timeframe involved in the decision-making process, and other important details. You can also search the CFDA by keyword in the Grants database on the House of Representatives internal website.

The Foundation Directory is published by the Foundation Center, a national service organization offering an exhaustive collection of data pertaining to private sector funding. Most libraries have a copy of this publication. It is also available online for a monthly subscription charge at www.fdncenter.org.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Often, letters of support from elected officials and other community leaders enhance grant applications. Hence, many organizations will call to seek a letter of endorsement from their Congressman. Before drafting such a letter, carefully review the grant proposal. The “project summary” or “abstract” usually provides sufficient information. These are items that the applicant will have created already during the application process. Therefore, they should be able to provide a copy of this with little effort. A sample grant support letter is at the end of this section.

In addition to letters, the Congressman may choose to place a call expressing his support for a particular application. In these situations, staff should provide appropriate contact information for the decision makers within an agency. Sometimes the person with whom the application is submitted is appropriate, and the constituent can provide the information. Other times, staff may need to contact the agency before the Congressman calls to determine the appropriate individual.

GRANTS OR LOANS?

It is also important to note that constituents sometimes confuse government grants and government loan programs. For example, constituents who seek business grants from the Small Business Administration (SBA) or personal housing grants from the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), the Rural Housing Service (USDA), and the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) are sometimes disappointed to learn that these programs do not involve grants at all. These programs offer guaranteed loans that must be repaid.

Two exceptions to this general rule involving loans rather than grants are:

- **Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Grant:** The SBIR is an SBA-administered program that provides monetary awards for high technology companies involved in scientific research and development.
- **HUD rehabilitation grants:** The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development (HUD) also awards monies to cities and municipalities that are disbursed to homeowners in the form of rehabilitation grants. Local Community Development offices enter into contracts with homeowners and contractors to provide funds and labor for the correction of housing code violations.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Completed case sheet.
2. If a letter of support is requested, get a summary of the grant proposal and information on where the letter should be sent.
3. If the constituent requests information on funding sources, get as much information as possible about the type of program to be funded.

WEBSITES

Congressional Research Service (CRS): www.loc.gov/crs/

The Foundation Center: www.fdncenter.org

SAMPLE GRANT SUPPORT LETTER

Date

The Honorable (*appropriate government official*)

Agency

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear:

I would like to express my support for the grant application for (*provide detailed description of grant proposal, including the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, CFDA, number assigned to the offering*) submitted by (*provide clear identification of the constituent who is the submitting organization or individual.*)

In preparing this grant application, (*applicant*) cited many factors contributing to the need for this funding. (*Briefly summarize data supporting the need for grant funding.*)

(*Optional paragraph describing the problem that would be solved or ameliorated by the use of these funds for the applicant's program.*)

I ask that you give this grant application your most thoughtful and serious consideration. If you need additional information, please contact (*name staffer*) in my (*indicate district or Washington*) office at (*telephone number*), or feel free to call (*provide name and direct telephone number of applicant.*)

I would very much appreciate your acknowledging receipt of this letter with a response to my (*indicate district or Washington*) office at (*office address.*)

Thank you very much for your time and attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I may be of assistance as you make your determinations.

Sincerely,

(*Name of Congressman*)

Member of Congress

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is the parent agency for the Food and Drug Administration and other healthcare related agencies.

This department is responsible for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Public Health Service, and dozens of smaller agencies related to health and aging. (The Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), which administers Medicare and Medicaid, is also under the jurisdiction of HHS. It is covered in the *Social Security* section of this manual).

FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

Most questions will concern drugs being tested for approval and the timetable for release. Other constituents may have questions about certain products which are marketed with exaggerated claims about their performance.

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

NIH is a very large medical organization operated by the federal government, mainly for research purposes. A patient can be admitted to NIH facilities only upon the recommendation of a physician. The physician must submit certain documents and information to the appropriate research center at NIH. A physician may contact you and ask for the Congressman's assistance in obtaining admission for one of his or her patients. You can write a letter to the research center to express the Congressman's interest, but the ultimate decision will be made at the center. Medical treatment at the facility is free, but the patient is responsible for transportation to and from the center.

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

The PHS coordinates and develops federal policy on public health issues and is led by the Surgeon General.

OTHER AGENCIES

Information about other HHS agencies can be found at the HHS website. Some of the more prominent agencies are:

- Administration for Children and Families
- Administration on Aging
- Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Indian Health Service
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

CONTACTS

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Congressional Liaison Office
Hubert H. Humphrey Bldg., Room 416-G
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201
Phone: 202/690-6786
Fax: 202/690-6351 or 202/690-7380
website: www.hhs.gov

Food and Drug Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
5600 Fishers Lane, Room 1555
Rockville, MD 20857
Phone: 301/443-1127
Fax: 301/443-2567
website: www.fda.gov

HUD / HOUSING

HUD administers federal housing programs, most of which are administered on state and local levels. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) helps with home loans.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) primary mission is to oversee federal housing programs for low-income individuals and families. These programs are usually administered by the states, either through the local Social Services agencies or a Public Housing Authority (PHA). The most common problems involve constituents who have applied for housing assistance and are on a long waiting list or those who have been denied a housing subsidy.

SECTION 8 HOUSING

The Section 8 program provides rent subsidies to low-income individuals who live in HUD-approved, privately-owned housing. The most common casework involves constituents who are seeking assistance in locating rental housing due to a limited income. You should advise the constituent to contact the appropriate agency, usually the Public Housing Authority, and apply for subsidized housing.

PHA HOUSING

Public housing typically consists of multi-family units owned and managed by the local Public Housing Authority. In addition to constituents who are looking for housing, you will receive complaints about tenants. Federal law prohibits convicted felons from living in public housing. There are also other restrictions on who can live with tenants. Your casework may involve these and other issues, and your best first contact is the local PHA.

WAITING LISTS

Most all agencies that administer subsidized housing programs have a waiting list. A constituent will call and say that he or she cannot wait or has not been contacted by the agency since application for assistance was made. You may tell the constituent you will contact the agency for a status report. Help can be given in certain emergency situations, but agencies are understandably hesitant about putting one qualified applicant ahead of another.

HUD LOAN FINANCING

Contrary to popular belief, HUD does not actually make mortgage loans. The agency does, in qualified cases, insure loans through a lending institution such as a bank or savings and loan. The constituent must first qualify through a conventional lender. See the *FHA* information later in this section.

HOME IMPROVEMENTS

Title I programs help HUD-insured homeowners make home improvements such as

HUD/HOUSING - CONTINUED

water purification, weatherization, etc., using low-interest loans. You can contact your HUD regional office for more information about such programs in your area.

A congressional inquiry into any of these programs is meant to assure that constituents are aware of all of the possibilities of assistance and to inform them of the proper agency to contact. Always work cordially with state and local officials because they administer most of these programs. However, if you run into a difficult situation, do not hesitate to contact the HUD regional office.

INSURANCE PREMIUM REFUNDS

A *Premium Refund* is the balance remaining of a prepaid mortgage insurance premium when the mortgage is paid for prior to the end of the mortgage term. It applies only to homeowners whose mortgages were insured by HUD after Sept. 1, 1983. Sometimes constituents have a problem in securing those refunds.

A *Distributive Share* is a distribution of any excess earnings of the Mutual Mortgage Insurance (MMI) which is funded by the mortgage insurance premiums homeowners pay. When the earnings of the MI Fund exceed the amount needed for expenses and insurance reserves, the excess is paid as “distributive shares” to HUD-insured homeowners when their mortgage insurance is terminated.

FEDERAL HOUSING ADMINISTRATION (FHA)

The Federal Housing Administration has jurisdiction over insured mortgage loans through the U.S. Department of HUD. FHA mortgage insurance allows a home buyer to make a modest downpayment and obtain a mortgage for the balance of the purchase price.

The mortgage loan is made by a bank, savings and loan association, mortgage company, credit union, or other FHA approved lender. FHA (HUD) insures the loan and pays the lender if the borrower defaults on the mortgage. Because the lender is protected by this insurance, it can offer more liberal mortgage terms than the prospective homeowner might otherwise obtain.

HUD does not make direct loans to help people build or buy homes.

WHO CAN QUALIFY?

Almost any individual who has a satisfactory credit record, enough cash to close the loan, and sufficient steady income to make monthly mortgage payments without difficulty can be approved for an FHA-insured mortgage.

Generally, only people who will reside in the property are eligible for FHA-insured mortgages. HUD sets no upper age limit for the borrower, nor does HUD require that the borrower have a certain income level to buy a home at a certain price.

Income is simply one of several factors that help a lender and HUD determine whether the borrower will be able to repay the mortgage. FHA mortgages are available to individuals regardless of race, creed, religion, sex or marital status.

There are also FHA programs for contractors who want to construct low-income housing. Contact the regional HUD office for information.

VETERANS

Special terms are available to qualified veterans purchasing a single-family home. The veteran must present a Certificate of Veterans Status from the Department of Veterans Affairs. There is no limit on the number of times an eligible veteran can use his/her eligibility in HUD programs.

TYPES OF FHA MORTGAGES

HUD insures mortgages to buy existing homes, to improve homes, to purchase a newly built home, and to refinance existing indebtedness. FHA insured mortgages are available for many types of properties, including:

- One family residences or condominium units
- Two, three and four unit properties
- Houses needing rehabilitation

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Name, address, and phone number of constituent.
2. Names and ages of other household members.
3. A completed case sheet. The Social Security number will sometimes be needed.
4. A signed Authorization Form.

CONTACTS

For cases other than Section 8 and PHA housing, you should contact your HUD Regional Office. For the location of the HUD Regional Office which serves your area, contact the HUD Congressional Liaison Office in Washington, DC.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
 Office of Congressional Relations
 451 7th Street SW, Room 10120
 Washington, DC 20410
 Phone: 202/708-0380
 Fax: 202/708-1350
 website: www.hud.gov

For cases involving Section 8 and Public Housing Authorities, you should contact the agency that administers those programs.

SECTION

4

Immigration and Customs	4 - 1
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IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS

Immigration and Customs issues are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security. Immigration can be a large casework category, depending on your location.

There are three primary agencies you will work with in handling immigration and customs issues:

- *Citizenship and Immigration Services* (CIS), which as its name implies, handles immigration services.
- *Immigration and Criminal Enforcement* (ICE) and *Customs and Border Protection* (CBP) handle immigration enforcement and customs matters.

IMMIGRATION SERVICES

Most of the immigration related inquiries you will receive from constituents will involve CIS functions. The most common requests involve the documentation and admission of aliens and the naturalization of qualified aliens. In general, you will be called upon to explain how to file for a particular immigration benefit, provide forms, or check the status of a case.

You may also be asked for help expediting the processing of a particular case. You will have little or no success in this area. Out of fairness to all applicants, CIS will consider expedite requests based only on one or more of the following criteria:

- 1) Severe financial loss to a company or individual
- 2) Extreme emergency situation (natural disasters, war, etc.)
- 3) Humanitarian situations (medical necessity, death of a family member, etc.)
- 4) Nonprofit status of requesting organization in furtherance of the cultural and social interests of the United States
- 5) Specific request from a federal agency based on national security or other significant national interests
- 6) To mitigate a CIS processing error
- 7) Serves the compelling interests of CIS

The documentation and admission of aliens is primarily achieved through the issuance of visas.

Aliens may also be admitted to the U.S. through *asylum, refugee status, advance parole, humanitarian parole, and deferred inspection.*

The *naturalization* process is how aliens who are lawful permanent residents of the U.S. become U.S. citizens.

This section will provide a brief overview of the admission and naturalization options available to aliens.

VISAS

There are immigrant and nonimmigrant visas. *Immigrant visas* allow the alien recipient to reside in the U.S. permanently. *Nonimmigrant visas* are issued to aliens for temporary stays in the U.S. Certain aspects of the process may also be handled by the Department of State and the Department of Labor. The forms and instructions needed file visa petitions and other requests with CIS can be downloaded at: www.uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/index.htm

It is important to advise constituents to review all instructions carefully. In most cases, a combination of CIS forms are required to petition for a particular benefit. The applicant must pay close attention to instructions provided in the primary petition to ensure he or she has downloaded all the necessary forms. You can also download and print forms from the CIS website to provide for constituents who do not have the ability to download the documents themselves. However, you will need to exercise caution to ensure you send all the needed forms and instructions, including accurate information on filing fees and filing addresses.

IMMIGRANT VISAS

An individual who wants to enter the U.S. for the purpose of residing here permanently must obtain an immigrant visa through one of the immigrant visa categories. A visa application filed with CIS is referred to as a visa petition. The person or organization seeking the visa for an alien is referred to as a petitioner. The alien for whom the benefit is being sought is referred to as a beneficiary.

If a person in the U.S. as a nonimmigrant decides he or she wants to remain permanently and meets the criteria for doing so, he or she may apply for adjustment to resident alien status while remaining in the U.S. For a further explanation of eligibility to apply for permanent residence status in the U.S., refer to the following website: www.uscis.gov/graphics/services/residency/index.htm

An alien ineligible for adjustment in the U.S. must interview for his or her immigrant visa at a U.S. consular post abroad. In such cases, the visa petition is filed with CIS. If approved by CIS, the petition is referred to the Department of State National Visa Center (NVC) to be prepared for final processing at a U.S. Consular post abroad. After the case is referred to the consulate or embassy, a consular officer will make the final decision on visa issuance.

There are limits on how many immigrants can be admitted to the U.S. during each calendar year for many of the categories. The Department of State "Visa Bulletin" provides a breakdown of these categories and information regarding the availability of visas in each category. The "Visa Bulletin" is updated monthly. You can access the "Visa Bulletin" online at the following address:

www.travel.state.gov/visa/frvi_bulletincurrent.html

The following is a brief outline of each immigrant visa category. Detailed information regarding each immigrant visa category and adjustment of status is available on the CIS and Department of State websites:

www.travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants.htm

www.uscis.gov/graphics/services/index.htm

IMMEDIATE RELATIVES OF U.S. CITIZENS

A spouse, minor child, minor stepchild, or parent of a U.S. citizen is classified in the IR category. An alien child adopted by a U.S. citizen can also qualify for the IR category. There are no numerical limits on the number of aliens who can be admitted in the IR category each year. Further details on the IR category can be found at www.uscis.gov/graphics/services/residency/family.htm Visa petitions in the IR category are filed on form I-130 (Petition for Alien Relative).

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIONS

A U.S. citizen can apply for permission to bring an orphaned child to the United States by following the procedures explained in detail in the following Department of State link: www.travel.state.gov/family/adoption.html

The remaining immigrant visa options are classified within three categories; *family sponsored, employment based, and diversity*. Each visa option within these categories is known as a preference. There is an annual limit of visas that may be issued in the preference categories. The total numbers of visas available are divided between residents of each independent country and dependencies worldwide.

FAMILY SPONSORED

Family sponsored visa petitions are filed on form I-130 (Petition for Alien Relative). Family sponsored preferences are:

First: unmarried adult sons and daughters of U.S. citizens

Second A: spouses and minor children of permanent resident aliens

Second B: unmarried adult sons and daughters of permanent resident aliens

Third: married sons and daughters of U.S. citizens

Fourth: siblings of U.S. citizens.

EMPLOYMENT BASED

Employment based immigrant visa petitions are filed on form I-140 (Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker). Most employment based visas also require verification that there are no U.S. citizens or permanent residents available to fill the job in question and that fair market wages and conditions are being offered.

IMMIGRATION - CONTINUED

This is most often accomplished by the employer filing a Department of Labor form ETA-750 (Alien Labor Certification) with the Employment Security Commission (ESC) or similar agency in his or her state. If the ESC approves the labor certification, it forwards it to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) for final approval. If approved by DOL, the labor certification is then sent back to the employer to submit to CIS with the visa petition. The forms and instructions needed to file an alien labor certification can be downloaded at the following DOL website: www.ows.doleta.gov/foreign/perm.asp

The documentation that must be submitted with the petitions and the need for a labor certification varies according to the preference category. This is outlined in the instruction pages of the employment based immigrant visa petition. Employment based preferences are:

First: priority workers (i.e. outstanding academics or multinational executives)

Second: members of the professions holding advanced degrees or persons of exceptional ability

Third: professionals and skilled workers

Third Other: unskilled workers

Fourth: certain religious workers

Fifth: employment creation investors

DIVERSITY IMMIGRANTS

55,000 immigrant visas are allocated each fiscal year to provide immigration opportunities for individuals from countries that have a relatively low number of people immigrating to the U.S. The visas are issued through a lottery program known as the AA-1 diversity program. This category varies each year. Specific instructions for seeking this benefit and news about developments in the program are available at the following Department of State website:

www.travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants_types_diversity3.html

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA)

Congress passed VAWA in 1994 to allow the spouses and children of United States citizens or lawful permanent residents (LPR) to **self-petition** for adjustment to resident alien status under certain circumstances. Under the law, certain battered immigrants can file for immigration relief without the abuser's assistance or knowledge, to seek safety from the abuser. Details about VAWA and the application process can be found at:

www.uscis.gov/graphics/howdoi/battered.htm#background

CATEGORIES WITH IMMIGRANT AND NONIMMIGRANT ELEMENTS**K-1 FIANCEE OF UNITED STATES CITIZEN**

This nonimmigrant classification is designed to admit fiancées of U.S. citizens into the U.S. so they can marry and adjust to resident alien status in the U.S. The alien must marry the U.S. citizen within 90 days of the date he or she is admitted to the U.S. or the visa becomes invalid and the alien must depart the U.S. Although it is a nonimmigrant visa, the K-1 is a bridge to immigrant status. Details regarding K-1 visas are available at the following website:

www.travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants_types_marriage2.html#1d

LIFE ACT

The Legal Immigration and Family Equity Act (LIFE), enacted December 21, 2000, created the following changes:

- Section 245(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act is available temporarily to people physically present in the United States on the date of enactment, December 21, 2000. The provision allows a person who qualifies for permanent residency, but is ineligible to adjust status in the U.S. because of an immigration status violation, to pay a \$1,000 penalty to continue processing in the United States. In order to be eligible for 245(i) adjustment under the LIFE Act, a person must be the beneficiary of an immigrant petition or application for labor certification filed on or before April 30, 2001.
- A new “V” non-immigrant status is available to the spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents who have waited more than three years for an immigrant visa based upon an immigrant petition filed on or before the enactment date of the LIFE Act. Persons granted “V” status can receive employment authorization and are protected from removal.
- A new temporary “K” visa status is available to spouses of U.S. citizens (and their children) living abroad
- Persons who filed before October 1, 2000, for class membership in one of three “late amnesty” lawsuits (CSS v. Meese, LULAC v. INS, and Zambrano v. INS) and who are eligible under the LIFE Act’s legalization provisions may apply to adjust status during a 12-month period that begins once regulations are issued. Spouses and unmarried children of the class action claimants are protected from certain categories of removal and eligible for work authorization if they entered the United States before December 1, 1988 and resided in the United States on that date.

Details about LIFE Act provisions are available at the following website:

www.uscis.gov/graphics/services/residency/life.htm

IMMIGRATION - CONTINUED

NONIMMIGRANT VISAS

There are many nonimmigrant visas to accommodate the various needs individuals have to visit the U.S. on a temporary basis.

Most nonimmigrant visa applications are filed by the alien directly with a U.S. consular post in the country where he or she lives. However, there are several exceptions, particularly in the employment based classifications. A detailed breakdown of the various nonimmigrant visa categories and the application process for each one can be found at: www.uscis.gov/graphics/services/tempbenefits/index.htm

Aliens can apply to change from one nonimmigrant status to another or extend duration of stay by filing form I-539 (Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status). Changes to and extensions of employment based temporary classifications are filed on form I-129. These forms can be downloaded from the CIS forms link cited earlier in this section.

OTHER METHODS OF ADMISSION

ASYLUM

An alien in the U.S. who has evidence that he or she will be persecuted upon return to his or her home country on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion can apply for asylum.

REFUGEE STATUS

The criteria for refugee status are similar to those for asylum. However, refugees are admitted to the U.S. through a third country after the Department of State determines that he or she should be classified as a refugee.

ADVANCE PAROLE

If an alien needs to enter the U.S. and is ineligible for admission under a visa classification, it is possible to apply for parole. The various parole types – Advance, Humanitarian, and Public Interest – are sought by filing a form I-131 (Application for Travel Document). Applicants for adjustment to resident alien status who are in the United States and wish to leave the U.S. and return while their cases are pending most commonly seek advance parole.

HUMANITARIAN PAROLE

This option allows otherwise inadmissible aliens to enter the United States temporarily. They are issued sparingly and are approved only in cases involving extraordinary emergencies. The application process for humanitarian parole is described at: www.uscis.gov/graphics/services/humanparole/index.htm

PUBLIC INTEREST PAROLE

Public Interest Parole is rarely granted. It is most often given to individuals who

apply for refugee status at a U.S. consular post abroad and fail to qualify. It can be granted only if the consular officials determine that admitting the alien is in the best interest of the U.S. and its policies. The applicant files the application for Public Interest Parole directly with the consular post.

TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS (TPS)

TPS is a temporary immigration status granted to eligible aliens who are temporarily unable to safely return to their home country because of ongoing armed conflict, the temporary effects of an environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. The list of countries whose citizens are eligible for TPS is subject to frequent change. To monitor these changes and obtain more detailed information about TPS, refer the following link:

www.uscis.gov/graphics/services/tps_inter.htm#whatistps

NATURALIZATION AND CITIZENSHIP

NATURALIZATION

An alien who has resided in the U.S. as a lawful permanent resident for five years may qualify to file to become a naturalized citizen. There are several additional requirements and exemptions concerning qualifying for this benefit.

- The applicant must be 18 years of age or older.
- The applicant must not have been absent from the U.S. for more than one year at a time during the five year period preceding the filing of the naturalization application.
- The applicant must not have been absent from the U.S. for a total equal to or exceeding 30 months during the preceding five year period.
- The applicant must meet certain character and loyalty standards. These standards are outlined in the publication *Naturalization Requirements and General Information*.
- Spouses of U.S. citizens whose spouse has been a citizen of the U.S. for at least three years may file for naturalization after three years of permanent residency.

To file to become a U.S. citizen, the applicant needs to complete a form N-400 (Application for Naturalization). The completed form should be sent to the CIS office having jurisdiction over the applicant's place of residence.

After the application is submitted, CIS will notify the applicant when he or she needs to appear for an interview. At the interview, the application will be reviewed and eligibility determined. Unless exempt by age or other circumstances, an examination will be given to determine whether the applicant has the required knowledge of English, history and U.S. government structure.

IMMIGRATION - CONTINUED

If the applicant is found eligible for naturalization, a favorable recommendation is made on a petition filed with the immigration section of the federal court having jurisdiction over the area where he or she resides. A final court hearing date depends on the processing time and caseload of the court. A judge administers the oath of allegiance at the final hearing and the applicant becomes a U.S. citizen. If a negative decision is reached, the applicant may appeal the decision with the court.

Detailed information about the naturalization process, including the publications and study material for the naturalization test, can be accessed at:
www.uscis.gov/graphics/services/natz/index.htm

CITIZENSHIP

You will be asked on occasion to help a constituent determine if he or she acquired citizenship at birth or through a parent's naturalization. Typically, these questions will come from the children of aliens or persons who were born abroad to U.S. citizen parents. A detailed explanation of the scenarios under which a person can acquire citizenship without going through the naturalization process can be found at the following website:
www.uscis.gov/graphics/services/natz/citizen.htm

CHILD CITIZENSHIP ACT

Signed into law on October 30, 2000, this law amends the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) to permit foreign-born children — including adopted children — to acquire citizenship automatically if they meet certain requirements. It became effective on February 27, 2001. Specific instructions for pursuing this option can be found at: www.uscis.gov/graphics/services/natz/bio_residing_us.htm

OTHER POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Replacing Lost or Stolen Alien Registration Cards and Renewing Cards: Typically, a person seeking to replace or renew an alien registration card (Green Card) will need to appear in person at their local CIS office. To do this, the applicant will need to use the following online tool to schedule an appointment:
www.infopass.uscis.gov/

Under some circumstances, applicants can request new cards through an online application process. The forms, instructions, and additional details about card replacement can be found at the CIS forms website.

OTHER RESOURCES

It is important to realize that this section does not address all of the questions and problems you will encounter in CIS casework. In addition, due to the rapid pace at which changes occur in immigration regulations and procedures, it is

entirely possible that some of this section's content will be out of date before a new revision is published. Thus, it is vital for an immigration caseworker to be vigilant in maintaining continuing education efforts. One excellent resource for keeping up-to-date on breaking developments is the CIS briefing site for congressional caseworkers. That address is:

www.uscis.gov/graphics/aboutus/congress/index.htm

Another source used by many immigration caseworkers is a free daily newsletter published by immigration attorneys. The newsletter entitled *Immigration Daily* is delivered via e-mail. You can subscribe to it at the following site: www.ilw.com

It is important to establish a good working relationship with your CIS contacts. It is inevitable that you will be asked a question about which you are totally unfamiliar. At that time, your contacts will be invaluable in obtaining the information you need.

MAKING INQUIRIES WITH CIS

The contact office listed for a particular immigration topic is also the appropriate office to file applications and petitions relevant to that topic. The forms section of the CIS website includes a list you can use to determine which CIS offices have jurisdiction for specific immigration benefits for each state. This information is also available from the CIS Congressional Liaison Unit in Washington.

The preferred method for placing inquiries with the CIS, National Visa Center, and consular posts is via e-mail. The agencies prefer this method because e-mails are easier to prioritize for response and keep track of than phone calls or letters. As a caseworker, you will prefer e-mails because they combine the immediate delivery of a telephone call with the paper trail of correspondence. This is particularly beneficial if there is a discrepancy between the information you receive from your CIS contact and the action taken by the agency.

You can handle the Privacy Act issue by advising your contact that you have an authorization on file when you place the initial inquiry. If you have scanning capability, you can attach the authorization form and any other needed attachments to your e-mail inquiry.

Many status inquiries for petitions pending with one of the CIS service centers can often be handled without having to contact the agency. If you have the service center receipt number, you can check the status of a case online at the following address:

www.egov.immigration.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp

INFORMATION TO GET

1. A completed CIS case sheet (in the *Forms* section of this manual) which outlines the case in detail should provide all the information you need.
2. A signed authorization form.

CIS CONTACTS

Headquarters Office of Congressional Relations
 Phone: 202/272-1940
 Fax: 202/272-1955
 Website: www.uscis.gov

Congressional Operations Branch
 Acting Director Monterey Rowe
 Phone: 202/272-1937

Congressional Legislative Branch
 Congressional Liaison Ruth E. Tintary 202/272-1947
 Congressional Liaison Michael Defensor 202/272-1948

REGIONAL OFFICE CIS CONTACTS

REGIONAL OFFICE	CONTACT	PHONE NUMBER
Eastern	Kim Duell	802/872-6066
	Fax	802/872-6078
Western	Joseph S. Joh	949/425-7299
	Neva Meis	949/425-7299
	Fax	949/360-2349
Central	Kathy Hacker	214/905-5429
	Fax	214/905-5318

DISTRICT OFFICE CIS CONTACTS

Albany	Martha Liston	518/220-2107
	Fax	518/220-2171
Albuquerque	Betty A. Garcia	505/241-0425
	Fax	505/241-0452
	e-mail	abq.congressional@dhs.gov

Anchorage	John Myatt Fax	907/271-3524/5 907/271-6444
Atlanta	Connie Roberts Fax	404/331-5793 404/331-5387
Baltimore	Kristie Krebs Fax	410/962-2338 410/962-7555
Boise	Robert Mather Fax	208/685-6611 208/685-6608
Boston	Tony Violanti Mary Ann Sciuto Fax e-mail	617/565-1520 617/565-1510 617/565-4810 boston.congressional@dhs.gov
Buffalo	Jeffrey L Belling Fax	716/551-4741 Ext 6010 716/551-3134
Charleston	Connie Roberts Fax	404/331-5793 404/331-5387
Charlotte	Linda M. Holton Fax e-mail	704/672-6949 704/672-6971 clt.congressional@dhs.gov
Chicago	Anita Goss-Fields Fax e-mail	312/385-1817 312/385-3404 chi-congressional@dhs.gov
Cleveland	Leslie Nelson Fax	216/535-0355 216/522-7039
Cincinnati	Char McCann Fax	513/684-3673 513/246-1403
Columbus	Richard Fleischauer Fax	614/469-2913 Ext 2007 614/469-2914

IMMIGRATION - CONTINUED

Dallas	Dora Ratcliff Clara Gutierrez Linda Johnson Fax e-mail	214/905-5760 214/905-5814 214/905-5824 214/905-5585 congressionals.dallas@dhs.gov
Denver	Marty Spears Fax e-mail	303/371-0986 Ext 109 303/361-0617 deninscongress@dhs.gov
Detroit	Greg Gellert Fax	313/568-6006 313/568-6056
El Paso	Priscilla Marta Fax e-mail	915/225-1777 915/225-1783 elp.congressional@dhs.gov
Fresno	Darvin L. Weirich Fax	559/487-5592 559/487-5939
Harlingen	Phyllis Hall Fax	956/389-7551 956/389-7553
Hartford	Donna Simcic Fax	860/240-3113 Ext 4163 860/240-3838
Helena	Erminia Fancher Fax	406/495-2191 406/495-2141
Honolulu	David G. Gulick Sherri (Gulick's Sec) Fax e-mail	808/532-2700 808/532-6382 808/532-6386 sherri.vegas@dhs.gov
Houston	Joyce Ellis Fax	281/774-4608 281/774-4607
Indianapolis	Leonard Susalla Fax	317/226-6181 317/226-7599
Jacksonville	Anthony Koziol Fax	904/232-2164 904/232-2388

Kansas City	Michelle Perry Fax	816/891-8352 816/891-7006
Las Vegas	Karen Dorman Fax	702/388-6640 702/388-6220
Los Angeles	Roland Lyons Fax	213/830-5119 213/830-5146
Louisville	David Sippel Fax	502/582-6380 Ext 222 502/582-6373
Miami	Rafaela Hidalgo Jocelyne Desrouleaux Berta Cassidy Walter Rivera Fax Fax	305/762-3617 305/762-3555 305/762-3339 305/415-6496 305/762-3362 305/415-6534
Memphis	Linda Gates Fax e-mail	901/333-1523 901/544-0279 congressional.memphis@dhs.gov
Milwaukee	Aimee Ouellette Fax	414/287-6393 414/287-6309
Newark	Robert Genesoni Arthur Clarke Stephanie Jones Barb Naprawa John Carrington Fax	973/645-4766 973/645-4766 973/645-4766 973/645-4766 973/645-4766 973/504-6933
New Orleans	Cynthia Turner Fax	504/599-7968 504/589-6325
New York City	Juan Lima Fax	212/264-5816 212/264-3410 212/264-0519 212/264-5907 212/264-5894 212/264-2269

IMMIGRATION - CONTINUED

Norfolk	Mary Ann Russell Fax	757/858-7524 757/858-6273
Oklahoma City	Heather Wells Fax	405/219-3179 405/219-3190
Omaha	Patricia Petznick Fax	402/697-0049 402/697-9064
Orlando	Millie Dominguez Fax	407/816-4631 407/816-1104
Philadelphia	Ardelia "Dee" Davis David Spaulding Fax	215/656-7180 215/656-7180 215/656-7145
Phoenix	Sharon Olivares Fax	602/379-3607 602/379-4190
Pittsburgh	Thomas Chesebro Fax e-mail	412/390-3946 412/390-3941 thomas.chesebro@dhs.gov
Portland, ME	Dawn Alley Fax	207/780-3624 207/780-3521
Portland, OR	Karen Brinkmann Fax	503/326-6874 503/326-2048
Providence	Jeff Trecartin Fax	401/528-5530 401/528-5549
Reno	Bob Grundy Fax	775/784-5186 775/784-5899
Sacramento	Gloria Ing Fax	916/930-3904 916/498-5906
Salt Lake City	Tom Goetsch Fax e-mail	801/955-0753 801/955-6290 utah.cng@dhs.gov
San Antonio	Mary V. Boris Fax	210/967-7156 210/967-7116

San Bernardino	Newton Hatten Fax	909/386-3340 909/386-3397
San Diego	Rebecca Sagun Fax e-mail	619/557-6363 619/235-4807 congressional.snd@dhs.gov
San Francisco	Maria Navarro Fax	415/844-5252 415/844-5255
San Jose	Theresa Sidusky Fax e-mail	408/918-3988 408/918-3801 ask.ins.san.jose@dhs.gov
San Juan	Ivan Ortiz Fax	787/706-2343 787/706-2349
Santa Ana	Gloria Dlouhy Fax e-mail	714/972-6502 714/972-6618 miacongrespteam@dhs.gov
Seattle	Leanne Leigh Fax e-mail	206/553-0576 206/553-1300 leanne.j.leigh@dhs.gov
St. Albans	Polly Smith Fax	802/527-3191 802/527-3262
St. Croix, V.I.	Dave Levering Fax	340/778-6559 340/778-6012
St. Louis	Alan Johnson Fax	314/539-2516 314/539-2444
St. Paul	Barbara Guck Amanda Wood Fax	952/853-2601 952/853-2813 612/313-9010
St. Thomas, V.I.	Irma Fuentes Fax	340/774-1390 340/714-2386
Tampa	Gayle Duke Fax	813/637-3009 813/288-1229

IMMIGRATION - CONTINUED

Tucson	William N. Johnston	520/620-7588
	Fax	520/670-4581
Washington, DC	Sam Crandle	202/353-9101
	Fax	202/307-1512
West Palm Beach	Susan Casis	561/841-0498 Ext 123
	Fax	561/863-2941

SERVICE CENTERS

Vermont		802/527-4972
	Fax	802/527-4851
	e-mail	vsc.congressional@dhs.gov
California		949/831-8480
	Fax	949/389-3409
	e-mail	csc.congressional-inquiries@dhs.gov
Nebraska Supervisor:	Roy Dykes	402/323-2596
	Shawn Allen	402/474-5720
	Bonnie Aranda	402/474-5720
	Mary Jo Colbert	402/474-5720
	Clark Crinklaw	402/474-5720
	Shirley Crouse	402/474-5720
	Gregory Fetterman	402/474-5720
	James Fortune	402/474-5720
	Dave Hall	402/474-5720
	Janelle Herres	402/474-5720
	Loyd Jones	402/474-5720
	Barbara Layman	402/474-5720
	Mary Mass	402/474-5720
	Charlotte Paylor	402/474-5720
	Fax	402/323-2595
	Public Number	402/323-7830
	e-mail	nebraska.congressional@dhs.gov

Texas

Kristy Harrison	214/962-2678	Kristy.Harrison@DHS.gov
Jay Choat	214/962-2675	Jay.Choat@DHS.gov
Cynthia X. Davis	214/962-2674	Cynthia.Davis@DHS.gov
Dale Bergeron	214/962-2672	Dale.Bergeron@DHS.gov
Bobbie Bizzell	214/962-2671	Bobbie.Bizzell@DHS.gov
Elma Ellington	214/962-2676	Elma.Ellington@DHS.gov
Esmeralda Langbein	214/962-2673	Esmeralda.Langbein@DHS.gov
Rick Luster	214/962-2677	Rick.Luster@DHS.gov
Fax	214/962-1452	

National Benefits Center (E-mail inquiries preferred – telephone only in emergency)

Fax 816/251-2330

Pat Boynton (Contact for Congressional Offices under the jurisdiction of the Texas and California Service Centers) /816/251-2499 ext.1 (nbc1.congressional@dhs.gov)

Janet Clay (Contact for Congressional Offices under the jurisdiction of the Nebraska and Vermont Service Centers) 816/251-2499 ext.2 (nbc2.congressional@dhs.gov)

USCIS ASYLUM OFFICES

Arlington Asylum Office	Jocelyn Prater Fax	703/525-8141 Ext 1346 703/812-8455
Chicago Asylum Office	Arlene Kelly Fax	312/353-9607 312/886-0204
Houston Asylum Office	Mary Flowers Fax	281/774-4843 281/774-5992
Los Angeles Asylum Office	Mary Winkler Fax	714/808-8239 714/808-8150
Miami Asylum Office	Sandy Mena Fax	305/530-6076 Ext 312 305/530-6070
Newark Asylum Office	Audra Coleman Fax	201/531-0555 201/531-1877
New York Asylum Office	Carlos DeJesus Fax	718/723-5954 Ext 1076 718/723-1121

IMMIGRATION - CONTINUED

San Francisco Asylum Office Michelle Henderson 415/293-1234 Ext 610
Fax 415/293-1269

DEPARTMENT OF STATE CONTACTS

National Visa Center
32 Rochester Avenue
Portsmouth, NH 03801-2909
Phone (Congressional Only): 603/334-0828
Fax (Congressional Only): 603/334-0791
e-mail: NVCCongressional@state.gov

AMERICAN EMBASSIES AND CONSULATES ABROAD

A complete and continuously updated list of contact information for consular posts abroad is available at:

www.travel.state.gov/travel/abroad_embassies.htm

ENFORCEMENT

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is responsible for the enforcement of immigration and customs laws within the United States, the protection of specified Federal buildings, and air and marine enforcement.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is responsible for all border protection functions. CBP duties incorporate the functions of U.S. Customs, U.S. Immigration, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and the entire U.S. Border Patrol.

IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

Often, employers will request guidance in satisfying their legal requirement to verify employees' eligibility to work in the United States. To do this, employers must complete I-9 (Employment Eligibility Verification) forms for each employee. Employers simply keep the completed I-9 forms in the employees' personnel files so they can be shown to ICE or U.S. Department of Labor officials in the event the business is ever inspected. Although compliance is enforced by ICE, I-9 forms and instructions are available at the CIS forms website provided in the Immigration Services portion of this section.

If a constituent wishes to report suspected illegal immigration activity, you will need to refer him or her to the public liaison for the ICE Office of Investigations with jurisdiction for your state. Your ICE congressional liaison will be able to direct you to the appropriate point of contact for the constituent.

Matters that fall within the purview of the Office of Investigations include human smuggling; narcotics, weapons and all other contraband smuggling; export enforcement, such as investigating illegal arms exports and exports of dual-use equipment that may threaten national security; financial crimes, such as money laundering, commercial fraud, intellectual property rights (including commercial counterfeiting) violations; cybercrime; immigration crime; and human rights violations. Some of these issues relate to functions previously performed by the U.S. Customs Service. These issues will be addressed later in this section.

You may also be contacted by constituents on behalf of friends or relatives who are under deportation or other removal proceedings. These issues are handled by the Office of Detention and Removal. It is rare for a congressional office to become involved in a deportation or removal case. People seeking assistance with such problems should be advised that a Member of Congress cannot serve as an advocate in a legal proceeding such as deportation. The most effective assistance will come from a qualified immigration attorney. Ethics guidelines prohibit caseworkers from recommending specific attorneys to constituents.

Immigration services and enforcement functions overlap with regard to student and exchange visitor visas. Although the State Department and CIS are involved in issuing and extending durations of stay for students, the overall student visa program called the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is administered by ICE. Most questions you will receive regarding student visas can be referred to the Designated School Official (DSO) for the school the student attends or plans to attend. However, there are occasions on which you may need to contact the ICE, CIS, or a consular post abroad to inquire about the status of a case or resolve a problem the DSO is having with SEVIS. Detailed information about student and exchange visitor issues can be found at the following link: www.ice.gov/graphics/sevis/index.htm

If you are located in a border state, you are likely to work closely with CBP with regard to constituent questions regarding Border Patrol functions.

CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

The most common Customs related questions you will encounter will come from individuals or businesses that have questions involving the shipment of goods into the United States. Companies importing items into the U.S. to be entered into commerce must meet stringent duty and documentation requirements. You may be called upon for guidance in meeting these requirements or to resolve a problem that has resulted in a shipment being held up at an inspection point.

Typically, the CBP port director for the inspection point in question will be your best contact to address the question or problem. A comprehensive list of contacts

for CBP offices nationwide, including port directors, can be found at the following website: www.customs.ustreas.gov/xp/cgov/toolbox/contacts/

ICE also has jurisdiction for customs issues that relate to national security concerns. ICE customs involvement is limited to illegal exporters, targeted foreign countries, terrorist groups, and international criminal organizations trafficking in Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and their components; obtaining and illegally exporting licensable commodities, technologies, conventional munitions, and firearms; exporting stolen property; and engaging in financial and other transactions which support these activities or which violate U.S. sanctions and embargoes.

OTHER ENFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

ICE functions that may generate constituent inquiries are as follows:

Office of Air and Marine Operations – Responsible for protecting the nation's borders and the American people from the smuggling of people, narcotics and other contraband. This office is also responsible for detecting and deterring terrorist activity with an integrated and coordinated air and marine interdiction force.

Office of Federal Air Marshal Service (FAMS) – Responsible for promoting confidence in our nation's civil aviation system through the effective deployment of Federal Air Marshals to detect, deter and defeat hostile acts targeting U.S. air carriers, airports, passengers and crews.

Office of Federal Protective Service – Responsible for policing, securing and ensuring a safe environment in which federal agencies can conduct their business by reducing threats posed against the more than 8,800 federal facilities nationwide.

Office of Intelligence – Responsible for the collection, analysis and dissemination of strategic and tactical intelligence data for use by the operational elements of ICE and the DHS.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. A completed case sheet
2. A signed authorization form.

CONTACTS

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)
425 I Street NW
Washington, DC 20536
Phone: 202/514-5232
Website: www.ice.gov/graphics/index.htm

Customs and Border Protection (CBP)
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20229
Phone: 202/344-1760
Website: www.customs.ustreas.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml

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5

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INFORMATION REQUESTS

There is a wealth of information available from government agencies. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) is especially helpful in responding to constituent requests.

Constituents request information about most any topic imaginable. While information is available from every government agency, the Library of Congress has an information and research service dedicated to serving Members of Congress and their staffs called the Congressional Research Service (CRS). If the information you are seeking is not readily available from the agency of jurisdiction over that subject, CRS is probably your best resource.

CRS provides reference, research and analysis to Members, Committees and staff of the U. S. Congress. In addition, CRS has a variety of in-depth information packets available. A list of these packets is available from CRS on request, and is a very helpful resource. You can also download this list from the CRS website.

Handle these requests as you would any other case, and keep the case file open until you receive the information and have forwarded it to the constituent. Advise the constituent that it may take several weeks to receive the material (CRS receives a large number of requests daily), but that you will send it as soon as it arrives. Many CRS publications are downloadable from the CRS website, which saves a considerable amount of time in responding to constituents.

If the information is not available on the website, contact CRS (or the appropriate agency) and request it. CRS will ask for the constituent's last name, your name, and the Congressman's name. After CRS has gathered the requested information, it will be sent to your Washington office to be forwarded to you.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Completed case sheet.
2. Information that the constituent is requesting.

CONTACTS

Requests should be phoned or faxed to CRS at the Library of Congress in Washington.

Phone: 202/707-5700
Fax: 202/707-6745
website: www.loc.gov/crs/

INTERIOR / NATIONAL FORESTS

The U.S. Department of the Interior manages national parks and monuments. The U.S. Forest Service handles national forests and timber management programs.

The U.S. Department of the Interior is charged with operating and maintaining most of our nation's public facilities, monuments, and national parks. The U.S. Forest Service, part of the Department of Agriculture, manages National Forests.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The National Park Service, a division of the Department of the Interior, oversees national parkways, parks, and monuments such as the Washington Monument and Mount Rushmore.

Questions and complaints from constituents may involve closed facilities or maintenance problems, restrictions on certain recreational activities, or protests about construction projects or other management proposals.

OTHER INTERIOR AGENCIES

Other divisions of the Interior Department include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Bureau of Reclamation, which inspects dams and other infrastructure.

NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE

National Forests are managed by the National Forest Service, which is *under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture*. Issues about National Forests are one of the primary battlegrounds for environmental groups.

Most calls you will get regarding National Forests will concern timber harvesting techniques or proposals, use restrictions, or legislative initiatives to designate additional lands as wilderness areas (natural areas where all development and many recreational activities are prohibited).

The National Forest Service sells timber from federal lands and is the contact for complaints or inquiries of this type. Often, the District Ranger will be of assistance in answering any questions the constituent might have.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Completed case sheet.
2. A thorough description of the problem, including documentation.

CONTACTS

U.S. Department of the Interior
Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs
Room 6242
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240
Phone: 202/208-7693
website: www.doi.gov

National Park Service
Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs
Room 7256
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240
Phone: 202/208-5656
website: www.nps.gov

U.S. Forest Service
Congressional Liaison Office
Room #5 NW
201 14th Street SW
Washington, DC 20250
Phone: 202/205-1637
website: www.fs.fed.us

For U.S. Forest Service casework, the first contact should usually be made with the District Ranger's Office with jurisdiction. Some districts prefer that you deal with a statewide or regional office.

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

IRS problems are especially frustrating to constituents. Congressional offices are often the first line of defense for taxpayers.

Problems involving the Internal Revenue Service can be among the most frustrating a constituent will face. Often, a constituent will receive a notice that he or she owes the IRS a rather large sum of money, and it comes as a big surprise. When the anger sets in, the first call is often to the congressional office.

You will also run into many other situations where the intervention of a congressional office is necessary, such as lost or delayed refund checks, a dispute over reported earnings, or assistance in expediting a tax-exempt application for a non-profit organization. The possibilities are limitless.

The IRS now handles all Congressional inquiries and other problematic cases through the Taxpayer Advocate Service (TAS). This is an organization within the IRS with its own command structure. Each IRS district office has a chief Taxpayer Advocate, who reports directly to the TA in the Washington headquarters.

Overall, this has been a favorable organizational change in that it has given both Congressional offices and taxpayers a more definite point of contact. However, it has not meant that taxpayers have a better success rate.

NOTICE OF LEVY

A constituent or business in the late stages of a dispute with the IRS may receive an ominous notice with a 10 day deadline threatening to padlock the business, garnishee wages, or levy bank accounts. On some occasions, due to computer problems or IRS error, the final notice might be the first one the constituent has received.

In cases such as these, the first course of action should be to contact the IRS, explain the problem, and request that any enforcement action be delayed until the case has been reviewed. Make sure to request that the congressional inquiry serve as the constituent's reply to the 10 day notice. In most cases, the IRS will comply with the request to delay action. It is your job to then forward the necessary information and request to the IRS for review, either by mail, phone, or fax. Because of privacy issues, the IRS has not yet embraced e-mail submission of cases.

DELAYED REFUND

There is no need to make an inquiry unless the return has been filed for at least six weeks. The caseworker or constituent can check the status of a refund by calling 1-800-829-4477, the IRS Automated Refund Status number, from a touchtone phone.

By entering in the Social Security number, filing status (married, single, etc.), and amount of refund due, the constituent will learn if the return has been processed and, if so, when the refund can be expected. This can also be done on the IRS website.

CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRIES

A congressional inquiry is not meant to circumvent IRS procedures. In many cases, the best action a constituent can take is to follow the normal appeals route; in some cases, that may be the only immediate course of action that can be taken. Your responsibility as a caseworker is to make sure the constituent is receiving fair treatment, and that his or her case is being handled in a timely manner.

Congressional inquiries often get faster attention than inquiries made by individual taxpayers, but do not make promises to the constituent.

Congressional offices have no jurisdiction over problems involving state or local income tax returns. Refer constituents to the appropriate state or local elected representative.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Name(s) and address as it appears on the return or correspondence from the IRS. If a tax return is involved, find out the filing status (married, single, etc.).
2. Social Security numbers of all parties involved.
3. If it is a business, you will need the Employer Identification Number (EIN).
4. A copy of recent correspondence from the IRS relating to the case. It is not always necessary to copy all of the constituent's information; copy enough of the records to document the problem. Often, a copy of the most recent correspondence received from the IRS is adequate.
5. A signed and dated authorization form, indicating the tax year or years in question, or a letter with an original signature.
6. A completed case sheet, including very specific notes about your conversation

CONTACTS

The Taxpayer Advocate's office in the District Office serving your area. The IRS Congressional Liaison Office in Washington can provide that information.

Internal Revenue Service
Congressional Liaison Office
1111 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 3241
Washington, DC 20224
Phone: 202/622-9590
website: www.irs.gov

JUSTICE

Most Justice casework will involve legal and prison issues, which are discussed elsewhere in this manual. You may also have inquiries regarding the FBI and the DEA.

Most of the cases involving the U.S. Department of Justice are explained in the *Legal* and *Prison* sections of this manual. Cases involving consumer fraud and complaints are usually under the jurisdiction of state government. Many states handle such cases in the Attorney General's office, although some may have separate consumer protection offices.

Problems can be wide-ranging, from automobile problems to misrepresentation of a product or service. Since Congressional offices do not have jurisdiction over state agencies, you can refer constituents to the appropriate state office. Another good source of assistance is the Better Business Bureau.

Other constituent inquiries may involve the Drug Enforcement Administration or the Federal Bureau of Investigation, both under the U.S. Department of Justice. Although these inquiries will be rare, contact the appropriate Congressional Liaison office for assistance.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Completed Case Sheet.
2. Signed Authorization Form

CONTACTS

U.S. Department of Justice
Congressional Liaison Office
Main Justice Building, Room 1603
Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues NW
Washington, DC 20530
Phone: 202/514-2141
Fax: 202/514-4482
website: www.usdoj.gov

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Congressional Affairs Office, Room 7240
10th and Pennsylvania NW
Washington, DC 20535
Phone: 202/324-4510
Fax: 202/324-6490
website: www.fbi.gov

Drug Enforcement Administration
Congressional Liaison Office
700 Army-Navy Drive
Arlington, VA 22202
Phone: 202/307-7363
Fax: 202/307-5512
website: www.usdoj.gov/dea/

For consumer-related problems, contact the appropriate state office.

LABOR

Problems involving the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) cover a wide variety of topics. The DOL has jurisdiction over employment-related matters.

The U.S. Department of Labor is one of our government's largest agencies. It is responsible for everything from wages to pensions to mine safety, and its responsibilities are delegated between more than a dozen different administrative offices.

This section will outline only the offices that deal with the most common issues you will be asked to address by constituents.

WAGE AND HOUR

When a constituent contacts you about an employer owing him or her overtime pay and back wages, you will need to put the constituent in touch with the DOL Wage and Hour Division office for your area. The Wage and Hour office will provide the constituent with the necessary forms to file a claim for wages due and will pursue the matter with the employer.

If a constituent has already done this and is concerned about the status or handling of his or her case, you will need to relay the constituent's concerns to the local Wage and Hour office.

A constituent may ask you to field questions concerning minimum wage and overtime requirements and exemptions set forth in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). You will be able to answer many of these questions by referring to the following DOL publications, which can be obtained through your local Wage and Hour office:

- *The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as Amended*, WH publication #1318;
- *Executive, Administrative, Professional and Outside Sales Exemptions Under the Fair Labor Standards Act*, WH Publication #1363;
- *Handy Reference Guide to the Fair Labor Standards Act*, WH Publication #1282;
- *Employers Guide to Compliance with Federal Wage-Hour Laws*, WH Publication #1340.

These publications and other resources needed to address wage-related questions can be found at the following website: www.dol.gov/dol/topic/wages/index.htm.

The Wage and Hour Division is also responsible for enforcing the *Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA)*. This law entitles eligible employees to up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave each year for certain family and medical

LABOR - CONTINUED

reasons.

Employers subject to the law are public agencies – including local, state, and federal agencies – and private sector employers which had 50 or more employees for at least 20 work weeks in the current or previous calendar year and who are engaged in commerce or any activity affecting commerce.

To be eligible for FMLA coverage, an employee must work for a covered employer for at least a total of 12 months, have worked for at least 1,250 hours over the prior 12 months, and work at a location where at least 50 employees are employed by the employer within 75 miles.

Inquiries regarding FMLA should be directed to the local Wage and Hour Division Office. Detailed information regarding employee rights and employer responsibilities under FMLA is available at: www.dol.gov/esa/whd/fmla/.

EBSA

You may receive inquiries from constituents regarding their retirement or group health benefits through private sector employers. Common questions involve problems in the distribution of retirement benefits and problems filing health insurance claims. You may be able to answer general questions yourself by using reference material made available to congressional staffs by the DOL. Other, more detailed questions and specific problems will require an inquiry to the Employment Benefits Security Administration (EBSA).

The best source of reference material for responding to general questions is *What You Should Know About the Pension Law*. This publication can be obtained from the EBSA office in Washington. It can also be accessed at the following website: www.dol.gov/ebsa/.

This booklet answers questions concerning access to a company's retirement plan information, eligibility for retirement plan participation, the accrual of benefits, benefit reduction restrictions, employee contributions, vesting, the effect of a break in company service by an employee, payment of retirement benefits, employee protection from mismanagement or abuse, protection from inadequate financing, plan terminations and corporate mergers, claim procedures, alternative retirement arrangements, and employee welfare benefit plans.

As with wage and hour related matters, you may encounter questions and problems that cannot be adequately addressed by the material available to you. In these cases, you should contact the EBSA office with jurisdiction over your district.

Some retirement questions, particularly in cases involving the closure of a company's 401(k) plan, will also require review from the Internal Revenue Service

(IRS). If this occurs, the EBSA will generally refer the applicable questions to the IRS for response.

OSHA

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is responsible for enforcing federal regulations designed to protect employees from hazardous working conditions.

Most OSHA casework involves addressing questions raised by constituents who feel their employers are violating safety standards. The best way to handle a complaint about workplace safety is to refer the constituent directly to OSHA officials.

Some states are authorized by the federal government to enforce federal OSHA rules within their boundaries. In addition, some states may have their own OSHA laws to enforce in addition to the federal regulations. Consequently, the point of contact will vary from state-to-state. If your state government enforces OSHA regulations, the constituent's initial complaint should be directed to the appropriate state agency. If necessary, the state will refer the matter to federal OSHA officials. If your state does not have such an agreement with the federal government, you should deal directly with federal OSHA offices.

If the constituent has already contacted OSHA and wants to follow-up or has other related questions, you can place an inquiry with the appropriate OSHA office.

The website for the federal OSHA program is: www.osha.gov

OWCP

The Office of Worker's Compensation Programs (OWCP) handles compensation claims for federal employees who have been injured during job-related activities. Most of the cases you will receive will involve a constituent's concern over the status of his or her claim or the receipt of his or her benefits. Whenever possible, you should direct your inquiry outlining the constituent's concerns to the OWCP office handling the constituent's case.

Sometimes it is not possible to determine the office handling the case from the information provided by the constituent. In this event, you should contact the OWCP office in Washington. That office can direct you to the appropriate area office.

OWCP also has oversight over the Division of Coal Mine Workers' Compensation, which was established to handle claims for coal miners who contracted black lung disease or other respiratory problems as a result of their work.

COBRA

The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA) requires certain employers who have group health plans to offer temporary continuation of employee medical benefits for terminated employees and their families.

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1989 (OBRA 89) modified some of the coverage continuation requirements established by COBRA. The changes enacted by OBRA 89 relate to the duration of coverage continuation.

Most of the questions you will receive regarding COBRA and OBRA 89 will be from constituents who have been terminated from their jobs and want to know if they qualify for coverage continuation. This section will outline some of the most frequently asked COBRA and OBRA 89 questions.

BENEFICIARY QUESTIONS

(The answers to some of these questions are different for beneficiaries affected by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). These differences are addressed in the HIPAA portion of this section.)

- ***What group health plans are subject to COBRA?*** Any plan sponsored by an employer who has 20 or more employees (including part-time workers) on 50% of the employer's working days during the preceding calendar year. Church plans and plans sponsored by the federal government are exempt from COBRA.
- ***What is a qualifying event?*** A specified event that results in the loss of group medical coverage. There are several types of qualifying events. The main qualifying events for employees are voluntary or involuntary termination for any reason other than gross misconduct, reduction of employment hours which would result in loss of coverage, retirement, and the employer's filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The qualifying events for dependents are divorce, legal separation, a child losing dependent status, and death of the covered employee.
- ***Who is a qualified beneficiary?*** An individual covered under a group health plan the day before a qualifying event occurs. Covered individuals include the employee, the employee's spouse, and his or her dependent children. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) extended the definition of a qualified beneficiary to include a child who is born or placed with the covered employee during the COBRA coverage period.
- ***When is the employee responsible for reporting a qualifying event?*** The employee or the employee's dependent must notify the plan administrator within 60 days after a qualifying event.

• ***When is the employer responsible for reporting a qualifying event?:*** In the event of an employee's death, reduction of hours, or Medicare eligibility, the employer is required to notify the plan administrator within 30 days of the event. In turn, the plan administrator must send the qualified beneficiary a written election notice within 14 days of the date the plan administrator receives information regarding the qualifying event. You should note that in many cases the employer and plan administrator are the same person.

• ***What is a plan notice and what does it entail?:*** An election notice is a document specifying details of the coverage continuation offer for the beneficiary. This is provided to the beneficiary by the plan administrator.

• ***What is an election period and when does it end?:*** An election period is the timeframe during which the qualified beneficiary may choose to elect continuation coverage.

• ***How long can I receive coverage continuation?:*** COBRA requires employers to offer coverage continuation for 18 months if the qualifying event is the termination of the covered employee or a reduction in the covered employee's hours. It further states that continuation must be offered for 36 months for all other qualifying events except bankruptcy. COBRA can be terminated if a qualified beneficiary becomes covered under a group health plan that does not exclude the beneficiary from services covered under the COBRA plan due to preexisting conditions.

OBRA 89 extended the maximum period of coverage for COBRA beneficiaries who were disabled at the date of the qualifying event from 18 months to 29 months. These individuals must meet the Social Security determination requirements as of the date of termination of employment or reduction of hours. HIPAA defines those eligible for the 11 months of additional coverage as all disabled beneficiaries otherwise qualified for the standard 18 months coverage. It also provides that the qualifying event of disability for additional coverage applies to beneficiaries who receive a Social Security disability determination during the first 60 days of COBRA coverage. The employee must notify the plan administrator before the end of the initial 18 month COBRA period and within 60 days of the date he or she receives a Social Security notification to be eligible for the extension of the COBRA period. The premiums for coverage after the 18th month may be increased to 150% of the regular premium as opposed to 102% during the first 18 months.

COBRA allows employers to cease continuation coverage before the end of the required period if the company terminates its group health plan for all employees, required premiums are not paid on time, or if the beneficiary obtains coverage through another group plan or Medicare.

OBRA amended these provisions so plan sponsors are no longer able to

terminate coverage continuation when a qualified beneficiary is covered under another group medical plan if the other plan contains preexisting limitations affecting coverage. This provision is effective for qualifying events occurring after December 31, 1989 and for qualifying beneficiaries electing COBRA coverage after December 31, 1988.

HIPAA also allows COBRA beneficiaries to withdraw funds from Medical Savings Accounts without penalty to pay their COBRA premiums.

OBRA AND MEDICARE

As mentioned above, OBRA '89 extended from 18 months to 29 months the maximum period of coverage for COBRA beneficiaries who receive a disability determination from the Social Security Administration (SSA) with an onset date on or before the date of the qualifying event. However, the determination must be made before the 18 month standard COBRA coverage expires. The OBRA extension is often vitally important to the COBRA beneficiary because it bridges the gap in coverage between the time the disability determination is made and the date the disabled person becomes eligible for Medicare coverage.

Delays in the disability determination process can result in the beneficiary missing the deadline for the additional coverage. The U.S. Department of Labor Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA), which is responsible for enforcing COBRA regulations, can ask SSA to issue a disability determination prior to the OBRA deadline. Although there is no guarantee that SSA will be able to comply with each request, this step does help improve the beneficiary's chances of making the deadline. To make the request, EBSA needs to know the beneficiary's name, social security number, the date the disability claim was filed, the date the COBRA coverage will expire, and which SSA office currently has the claim. You will want to coordinate an inquiry of this nature with your own office's SSA caseworker who can also make a similar request of his or her SSA contacts.

EMPLOYER QUESTIONS

On occasion, you may be contacted by employers with questions concerning their responsibilities under COBRA. These questions will often come from new businesses that are in the process of establishing a group health plan. Here are some common questions:

- ***How is basic COBRA disclosure achieved?***: To satisfy compliance regulations, plan administrators should incorporate a description of COBRA in their group plan description.
- ***How is general COBRA notification achieved?***: Plan administrators are required to provide general COBRA notification for each employee and his or her spouse once they begin coverage under a health plan. Upon request, the U.S.

Department of Labor will furnish the plan administrator with a sample notice to be used as a reference tool.

HEALTH INSURANCE PORTABILITY

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 was enacted to ensure that individuals who change jobs or become unemployed are not denied health insurance coverage because of preexisting medical conditions. The law bans the exclusion of individuals with preexisting conditions from plan enrollment. It also restricts the waiting time a group health plan can impose before covering preexisting conditions.

Although different aspects of the law will fall under the purview of varying federal agencies, the majority of the portability issues should be addressed by the Department of Labor.

The best source of information on this law is the Congressional Research Service Report entitled “*The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996: Guidance of Frequently Asked Questions*”.

LABOR POSTERS

You may receive requests from employers for the state and federal labor posters they are required to display at their businesses. State posters can often be obtained from your state’s Department of Labor. Federal posters are available, free of charge from DOL. They can be ordered from the agency or downloaded from the DOL website which is listed in the *Contacts* portion of this section.

DISLOCATED WORKERS

Typically, unemployment insurance compensation matters are handled by the state employment service agency. However, you may be called upon to address compensation and training questions for displaced workers seeking extended unemployment insurance, assistance based on layoffs associated with trade issues, or training assistance under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Comprehensive information regarding federal programs for displaced workers can be found on the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration website: www.doleta.gov/layoff/

In addition, workforce development professionals in your district may seek your assistance in utilizing federal dislocated worker programs to meet regional needs for workforce training. The availability of these training resources can also be beneficial in marketing the region to prospective employers. Comprehensive information regarding federal programs for displaced workers can be found on the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration website: www.doleta.gov/layoff/

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Constituent's name, address, Social Security number, and date of birth.
2. A signed authorization form.
3. A case sheet detailing the constituent's question or problem.

CONTACTS

Generally, the best sources for information and assistance are the local and regional offices serving your district. You can obtain contact information for the appropriate office for a specific inquiry from the Department of Labor Office of Congressional Liaison.

U.S. Department of Labor
Room S-2018
200 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20210
Phone: 202/693-4600
website: www.dol.gov

LEGAL

Constituents frequently want Congressmen to intervene in legal matters. Once a matter is before the courts, there is nothing a Congressional office can do.

Inquiries in this category usually involve a constituent's case in court or pending court action. He or she may disagree with a verdict that was rendered, have a case on appeal, complain about unfair treatment by the legal system, or want legal advice. Because of the separation of powers doctrine in our Constitution, Members of Congress typically have no jurisdiction over legal matters and should avoid involvement in them.

CASE IN COURT

Perhaps the most common complaint is that a case was continued without the defendant being notified. You will also have cases where a constituent disagrees with a verdict.

Stress to the constituent that the congressman has no jurisdiction over the court system. In general, your best course of action is to be a good listener. Most of the time, the constituent will realize after a talk with you that the best thing to do is to go back to his or her attorney and discuss any available options.

You may be contacted by a constituent complaining that he or she has a case on appeal, but has been unable to get the attorney to return calls to get any information. You can suggest that the constituent contact the Clerk of Court, or other court administrator, and ask if the case has been scheduled. Other than that, it is between the constituent and the attorney to resolve any lack of communication between them.

HELP WITH ATTORNEYS

If a constituent needs assistance in securing an attorney, or wishes to replace the one he or she has been using, most states have a Lawyers Referral Service operated by the state Bar Association. These organizations will provide constituents with the name or names of attorneys in their geographical area who specialize in the type of case for which the constituent needs help, and may arrange a low-cost initial consultation.

If a constituent says that he or she cannot afford an attorney, you may direct him or her to the local Legal Services office. Legal Services is a federally-sponsored program that provides free or low cost legal assistance to low income individuals. Some Legal Services offices do not handle domestic disputes.

UNFAIR TREATMENT

Most of the contacts involving complaints of unfair treatment will come from divorced parents concerning child support payments. Recently, there has been an increase in contacts from families of convicted drug offenders.

The parent ordered to pay child support often says that he or she cannot afford to pay the amount ordered by the court. If the constituent was not represented in court by an attorney, suggest that one be retained. Again, a Congressional office has no jurisdiction over matters of the court.

PARDON REQUESTS

You will have a few requests from former inmates wanting information on how to apply for a pardon.

State Pardon: You should advise the constituent to contact the Office of the Governor, or other appropriate state office, and request instructions on applying for a pardon.

Federal Pardon: You can contact the Congressional Liaison office of the U.S. Department of Justice and request an application to be forwarded to the constituent. It is the constituent's responsibility to follow the instructions and complete the request.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Completed Case Sheet.
2. Signed Authorization Form or letter (if the release of records will be required).
3. If applicable, the inmate's name, mailing address of the facility, the inmate's registry number, and date of birth.
4. The name, address and phone number of the person contacting the office on behalf of the inmate (if applicable).

CONTACTS

U.S. Department of Justice
Congressional Liaison Office
Main Justice Building, Room 1603
Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues NW
Washington, DC 20530
Phone: 202/514-2141
Fax: 202/514-4482
website: www.usdoj.gov

LEGISLATION / OPINION

Legislative matters are usually handled in the Washington office. Make sure you devise a system to ensure constituents receive a timely response.

In addition to casework, you will be contacted by constituents who want to ask the Congressman to either support or oppose a piece of legislation or to express their opinion on the issue of the day. They may also want background information, a copy of a bill, or specifically want to know the Congressman's stand on an issue.

A case sheet (or some other record as may vary from office-to-office) should be completed for each call, except in special circumstances (see below).

Write down the nature of the request as accurately as possible. If the person is expressing an opinion, there is no need to transcribe the entire conversation, but make sure you convey the essence of the constituent's viewpoint in your notes on the case sheet. If they are calling about a specific bill, try to get the bill number (H.R. – House bills, S. – Senate bills), or the topic of the bill. Assure them the Congressman will get their information and appreciates their call. Tell them that they will receive a response from the Congressman.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

At times, a controversial piece of legislation will generate hundreds of phone calls to the District Office. In those cases, you may wish to devise a different way of recording the opinions of the constituents so that you do not have hundreds of individual case sheets to deal with. Coordinate an alternative method with the Washington office; usually, a list of names and addresses along with brief comments is sufficient.

INFORMATION TO GET

In addition to accurately stating the constituent's opinion or request, *make sure that you have a complete address, and verify the spelling of the name.* It is likely that the constituent will receive additional mailings based on the name and address on the original case sheet.

Also get the phone number. On occasion, you may need to contact the constituent to follow-up or to clarify information.

SECTION 6

Military/National Guard 6 - 1

MILITARY / NATIONAL GUARD

Members of the Armed Services sometimes call about problems they have not been able to resolve through their chain of command.

Members of the Armed Services call Congressional offices frequently with problems that they have not been able to resolve through their chain of command, ranging anywhere from housing to transfer requests to emergency leaves.

Before any action is initiated, determine if the service member has indeed attempted to resolve the problem through his or her chain of command. If not, encourage that course of action before a congressional inquiry is made.

Each branch of service has a Congressional Liaison Office in Washington, and these offices will be your primary contacts for resolving military cases. The numbers and contact names are listed later in this section. Military cases should be handled in writing when at all possible.

The following pages outline the most common types of inquiries you will receive and advice for handling them.

INQUIRIES FROM RELATIVES

Problems with the military often involve both the service member and members of his or her family. In many cases, the family member will be the one to make contact with the Congressman's office.

The Armed Services are very strict about adhering to the Privacy Act and will not give out specific information on a service member (other than duty address) without written consent from that individual. Explain to the family member that a letter or Authorization Form from the service member is needed and should include all the information listed later in this section.

If this will take too long, or is impossible to obtain, you can ask the family member to write a letter explaining the situation, or you can make an inquiry based on your conversation. In either event, the military will work on the case, but the information you receive on the status of the case will be quite limited because you do not have disclosure authorization from the service member.

Inquiries should be directed to the Congressional Liaison office of the appropriate branch of service.

HEALTH AND WELFARE REPORTS

For various reasons, a service member might not contact his or her family for a

MILITARY - CONTINUED

long period of time and the family becomes concerned. In this case, what is known as a Health and Welfare Report may be requested by the Congressman's office. The service member's full name, Social Security number, rank, and last known location or base assignment will be needed. A call should then be placed to the appropriate liaison office and the situation explained. The liaison representative will know the best way to handle the particular situation.

REQUESTS FOR W-2 FORMS

During tax filing season, many former and current service members will call and ask for assistance in obtaining their Form W-2 (statement of earnings) for a particular year. The person's full name, address, Social Security number, rank and branch of service, and date and place of discharge will be needed. Call the appropriate liaison office and officials there will have the W-2 sent to the former service member and will let you know when it has been mailed.

DISCHARGES & REASSIGNMENTS

This category can get quite complicated, as many types of discharges and reassignments exist. Again, it is most likely going to be a family member of the service member calling to request that the service member be discharged or reassigned.

The service member must be the one to initiate any application for reassignment or discharge. Once the service member has initiated the process, he or she can then contact the Congressman's office. The service member should write a letter specifically stating what he or she has applied for and why. (See attached information sheets for more details. Information sheets can be provided to the family and the service member.)

EMERGENCY LEAVE

Emergency leave is sometimes necessary if a service member experiences a death or illness in his or her family. The Red Cross is the primary source of assistance with this matter.

The service member's family should first contact the Red Cross with all the appropriate information, and the Red Cross will send a message to the service member's commanding officer. The commanding officer and the service member will then discuss what leave options are available.

MILITARY RECORDS

The **Discharge Review Board** and **Boards for Correction of Military, Naval, and Air Force Records** exist for former service members who believe their discharge was given unfairly or there is an error or injustice in their military records. Applications and information on these topics are included in the guides provided by each branch of service.

The **National Personnel Records Center** (NPRC) is the central repository of military records. Former service members will contact their Congressman when they need copies of prior military service records such as a DD-214, medical records, and the 201 file (personnel file). Constituents requesting such materials should be sent a Standard Form 180 and an authorization form. Once the completed forms are returned, they should be sent to the NPRC for processing. The requested information will be sent to the Congressman's office and should be forwarded to the constituent.

A massive fire at the NPRC in the early 1970's resulted in the destruction of millions of valuable records. If records destroyed in the fire are needed, the military can reconstruct them with information from various other sources. However, the ability to reconstruct the records is limited.

NATIONAL GUARD

Inquiries regarding members of the **Army or Air National Guard** should be handled in the same way as inquiries for other members of military service. Ask for a letter if the problem is complicated; very simple problems may be handled by phone. See *Contacts* at the end of this section for the appropriate contact. National Guard units are technically under the jurisdiction of state governments, so the first contact on such cases will be with those officials.

DFAS

The Defense Finance & Accounting Service (DFAS) handles payroll and other financial matters for the military.

At the time of discharge, a quick overview of a service member's military financial account is done and a check for the approximate amount due the service person is issued, or they are paid in cash. After discharge, all account records are forwarded to the appropriate DFAS office for a final audit of the account. This process takes many months. If DFAS determines money is still owed to the government, the now ex-service member is sent a letter advising him or her of the debt.

It is at this point that the Congressman's office is most often contacted. Constituents should be advised to answer DFAS directly, either by applying for a waiver of the debt or advising DFAS why they believe they do not owe the debt. Encourage the constituent to provide a letter to the Congressman stating why he or she believes the debt is in error and a copy of any correspondence received from DFAS. Any documentation supporting the constituent's statements is also important. Once this information is received, a written inquiry from the Congressman should be sent to the appropriate DFAS office.

DFAS is also responsible for addressing retirement pay issues for retired

service members and Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuities for qualified dependents of deceased personnel.

TRICARE / DEERS

TRICARE, formerly the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS), is a medical benefits program for active duty service members. Families of active duty, retired and deceased members, and retirees of the uniformed services are also eligible for TRICARE.

Under the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2001, beneficiaries age 65 and over who receive Medicare are able to retain TRICARE as a secondary carrier. In addition, they will have access to TRICARE benefits that may not be covered under Medicare, such as prescriptions. To participate, beneficiaries must be eligible for Medicare Part A and enrolled in Medicare Part B.

The effective date for this provision was October 1, 2001. April 1, 2001, was the start date for eligible beneficiaries to receive access to military treatment facility pharmacies, the National Mail Order Pharmacy program and retail pharmacies. Beneficiaries who were 65 or older before April 1, 2001, will be eligible to use the pharmacy benefit without being enrolled in Medicare Part B. Those who turned 65 on or after April 1, 2001, will need to be enrolled in Medicare Part B to use the pharmacy benefit.

There are three levels of TRICARE benefits:

TRICARE PRIME

All active duty personnel are required to enroll in this managed care network. TRICARE Prime combines free services from military treatment facilities with a Primary Care Manager who refers patients to approved providers for specialty care. There are no enrollment fees for active duty members or their family members. However, retirees pay a quarterly premium. The plan also includes discounts for prescriptions filled at civilian pharmacies and free prescription services at military treatment facilities. Higher out-of-pocket costs are incurred for services from non-approved providers.

TRICARE EXTRA

This is a preferred provider plan option for retirees and their dependents. Coverage is limited to credentialed providers within the TRICARE Network and coverage is subject to deductibles and copayments. Beneficiaries can seek space-available care in military treatment facilities with no out-of-pocket expense. However, they have lower priority than TRICARE Prime enrollees. Retirees may use a combination of TRICARE Extra and Standard if they wish.

TRICARE STANDARD

This option offers the same benefits formerly provided by CHAMPUS. Claims are reimbursed at the same rate for all providers. It offers the greatest flexibility in choosing healthcare providers, but at greatest out-of-pocket expense. TRICARE Standard beneficiaries are also allowed to seek space available in Military Treatment Facilities, but have the lowest priority.

TRICARE beneficiaries can also enroll in a dental insurance plan. The contractor for this coverage is Delta Dental Uniformed Service Dental Program Division.

Typical constituent questions regarding TRICARE include requests for information about the three coverage options, problems with slow claims processing, claims being denied for inappropriate reasons, etc.

Get as much information as possible about the problem. When dealing with a disputed claim, obtain copies of the claim and the TRICARE Explanation of Benefits. If the patient is the dependent of the sponsor (retiree, active duty, service member, etc.), you will need a signed authorization from both the patient and the sponsor. Your TRICARE liaison will vary depending upon the region of the country you represent. The Department of Defense liaison can help you determine the appropriate contact.

DEERS

The Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting Service (DEERS) is the agency responsible for determining TRICARE eligibility for active and retired military personnel and their dependents. The most common constituent questions involving DEERS relate to whether or not constituents are eligible for TRICARE. As with TRICARE, authorization forms must be obtained from the sponsor (retiree, service person, etc.) as well as from the claimant.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Service member's full name, Social Security number, rank, unit/base assignment, and return mailing address.
2. A letter from the service member, if practical, including an original signature; or a letter from a family member of the service member.
3. Explanation of the problem, and what solution is requested.
4. Completed authorization form if no letter is available.

CONTACTS

ARMY

Chief, Legislative Liaison
1600 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-1600
Phone: Chief: Ms. Turner: 703/697-9461
website: www.army.mil

Depending on which area of the country you are located, the case will be assigned to one of three teams. Contact the liaison number above to determine which team serves your region. The team contacts are as follows:

Team 1: Ms. Kenia Bultman: 703/614-9582
Team 2: Ms. Ray: 703/697-9191
Team 3: Mr. Laughlin: 703/697-4773
Fax: 703/697-6988, 703/697-0690, or 703/697-3847.

Written inquiries may be sent to Army liaison by fax.

There is also an Army Liaison office located in the Rayburn House Office Building. That office can be particularly helpful on emergency cases. The phone number is 202/225-3853 and the fax is 202/225-2674.

AIR FORCE

Office of Legislative Liaison
SAF/LL
1160 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1160
Phone: 703/695-7215 or 703/697-8153
Fax: 703/693-6340
website: www.af.mil

Written inquiries may be sent to Air Force liaison by fax. To check the status of written inquiries, call 703/695-7364.

When a constituent or group requests a **military flyover** at a public event, they can go to the following website and complete the appropriate forms: www.airshows.pa.hq.af.mil.

The e-mail address for the office which handles flyover requests is: aerial.events@pentagon.af.mil. The phone number is 703/693-2558.

The Congressman can send a letter supporting the request.

NAVY

Chief of Legislative Affairs
1300 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-1300
Phone: 202/685-6003 or 202/225-7124
Fax: 202/685-6077
website: www.navy.mil

Written inquiries may be sent to Navy liaison by fax. To check the status of written inquiries, call 202/225-7126.

MARINE CORPS

Office of Legislative Assistant to the Commandant
Headquarters, US Marine Corps
2 Navy Annex
Washington, DC 20380-1775
Phone: 202/685-6003 or 202/225-7124
Fax: 202/685-6077
website: www.usmc.mil

Written inquiries may be sent to Marine liaison by fax. To check the status of written inquiries, call 202/225-7126.

COAST GUARD

Chief, US Coast Guard Congressional Affairs
B-320 - Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515
Phone: 202/225-4775
Fax: 202/426-6081
website: www.uscg.mil

Written inquiries may be sent to Coast Guard liaison by fax. To check the status of written inquiries, call 202/366-4280.

MILITARY - CONTINUED

NPRC

Mr. David Petree, Director
National Personnel Records Center
ATTN: Special Inquiry Section, Room 2077
9700 Page Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63132
Phone: 314/538-4177
Fax: 314/538-4175

Note: In bottom left corner of envelope, type: DO NOT OPEN IN MAIL ROOM

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Assistant Secretary of Defense
Legislative Affairs
Department of Defense
Room 3E966, The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1300
Phone: 703/697-6210
Fax: 703/695-5860
website: www.defenselink.mil
To check the status of written inquiry, call 703/695-7470.

DFAS

All DFAS related congressional inquiries are handled by the pay services center in Kansas City, Mo. The most effective way to place an inquiry with the DFAS liaison office is by fax.

Ms. Candice Maroney, Director
Defense Finance and Accounting Service
Military and Civilian Pay Services
Office of Congressional Liaison
1500 E. Bannister Road
Kansas City, MO 64197-0001
Phone: 816/926-5688
Fax: 816/926-8947
website: www.dfas.mil

AIR AND ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Since the National Guard is technically under state control, contact names, addresses, and other information should be obtained from the appropriate state government officials. For national problems concerning the National Guard, contact:

Departments of the Army & Air Force
National Guard Bureau
2500 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-2500
Phone: 703/697-1732 (recording) or 703/697-8788

TRICARE / DEERS

DEERS Support Office
400 Gigling Road, 5th Floor
Seaside, CA 93955
Phone: 831/583-2500
Fax: 831/655-8317
Public: 1-800-538-9552
website: www.tricare.osd.mil

Assistant Secretary of Defense
Legislative Affairs
Department of Defense
Room 3E966, The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1300
Phone: 703/697-6210
Fax: 703/695-5860
website: www.tricare.osd.mil

RESOURCE MATERIALS

Caseworker handbooks are available from each of the liaison offices. A new book is usually printed for each Congress and can be obtained by calling the appropriate liaison offices.

SECTION

7

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OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

The Office of Personnel Management, or OPM for short, is the personnel department for the federal government. Go here to address most federal job-related questions.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is, as the name implies, the personnel department for the federal government. This office has jurisdiction over payroll, group health benefits, and pensions for most federal employees.

The most common OPM cases involve requests for information about employment opportunities with the federal government, retirement pay, survivors' benefits, or life and health insurance.

The best procedure to follow in pursuing most OPM casework is to contact the congressional liaison office to explain the situation in as much detail as possible and request assistance for the constituent.

There are several sources from which a constituent can obtain information regarding employment opportunities with the federal government. They are itemized in the *Contacts* portion of this section.

You may receive requests for letters of recommendation from applicants for federal jobs. Members of Congress are allowed to write letters of recommendation on behalf of individuals seeking federal jobs or appointments. However, there are certain conditions placed on how the recommendations can be made. These conditions vary according to the nature of the job or appointment being sought. A detailed explanation is available on the House Standards of Official Conduct Committee website. You can also contact the committee staff if you have any specific questions.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Constituent's name, address, phone number, Social Security number, date of birth, claim number (*claim numbers are sometimes the same as the constituent's Social Security number*) and the name of the agency where he or she works or worked.
2. A signed authorization form (if the release of records will be necessary).
3. A Case Sheet outlining the constituent's problem in detail.

CONTACTS

Initial inquiries regarding retirement pay, survivors' benefits, or life and health insurance should be directed to the Congressional Liaison Office. That office

will direct you to a specific local office if necessary.

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Congressional Liaison Office
B-332 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515
Phone: 202/225-4955
website: www.opm.gov

•Information regarding federal employment opportunities can be obtained through the following contacts:

Any local OPM office.

Nationwide Telecommunications Device for the Deaf: 912/744-2299

The latest listing of federal employment opportunities is available online at the following address: www.usajobs.opm.gov

•For information regarding letters of recommendation, contact:

House of Representatives
Committee on Standards of Official Conduct
HT-2 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515
Phone: 202/225-7103
website: www.house.gov/ethics/m_EmploymentRecommendations.htm

PASSPORTS

Constituents often need help with passports. Congressional offices can help expedite issuance of passports or help with such issues as lost passports.

United States Passports are issued only to U.S. citizens. Each person must make application for his or her own passport, and can obtain application forms at either the Post Office or the Clerk of Court in most areas. The location will vary, and some counties or parishes may not have an office that handles passports.

The Department of State has a website that lists authorized passport agencies nationwide, and it is searchable by state and zip code. The website address is: www.travel.state.gov

Some constituents need their passports expedited because the departure date for their trip is imminent. Others simply like the reassurance of having their application sent through a Congressional office. Unless there is a legitimate need to have the application expedited, constituents are just as well served by going through normal channels.

NEW PASSPORTS

The constituent will need to apply for a new passport at an authorized office. An application form DSP-11 is required for each new passport applicant. When applying for a new passport, the applicant must provide two identical passport photos and proof of citizenship (such as a *certified* copy of birth certificate, *original* naturalization papers, or a previous passport; the Passport Agency will return these items with the new passport).

The passport forms must be filled out by the applicant and completed by the authorized official. The applicant is required (if over the age of 13) to appear in person and must show some type of identification. Applicants 13 years of age and under do not need to appear in person. Both parents, or one parent with a completed Form DS-3053 (<http://travel.state.gov/DS-3053.pdf>) from the other parent, can execute the application on the child's behalf.

New passports are valid for 10 years for adults and five years for minors.

FEES

If the applicant is age 16 or over, the total charge is \$85. The passport fee is \$55 and \$30 is charged for the execution of the application. If the application is completed at the Post Office, \$55 is paid to the Department of State and \$30 to the Postmaster. If application is completed at the Clerk of Court's office or other authorized agent, the \$30 fee will be paid to agent's office.

PASSPORTS - CONTINUED

If the applicant is under the age of 16, the total charge is \$70. The passport fee is \$40 and the execution fee is \$30; the procedure is the same as described above.

Fees for the passport can be paid by personal check, certified check, or money order, but not by cash.

The official completing the application will attach all the required material, including the fee, and prepare it for mailing to the regional Passport Office.

EXPEDITING A PASSPORT

If the departure date is within three weeks or if a visa is required for a trip, the applicant can ask the agent for permission to bring it to the Congressman's office to be expedited. If this is the case, ask the constituent to have the official completing the application to make an extra copy of the application for the Congressman's district office file, since the original application must be sent in an envelope that is sealed by the authorized agent.

When the application has been authorized and it is determined that the Congressman will expedite the passport, all the material from the authorized agent should be brought to the Congressman's office along with a copy of the passport application.

Prepare a memorandum requesting expeditious processing of the passport application, including a contact name in your office. Attach the memo to the sealed envelope. If an overnight carrier is to be used, also attach a completed airbill with a check, money order, or account number for return mail. Place all of this in an appropriate envelope for mailing to the Passport Office. Also send a letter to the constituent advising him or her that you have forwarded the passport application to the U. S. Passport Office and have asked that it be handled on an expedited basis.

Applicants who need service within *three weeks* must pay a \$60 expedite fee. The applicants should document their departure with photocopies of plane tickets or confirmed reservations showing departure within ten days. The expedite fee will be handled by the passport agent and will be sealed in the authorized agent's envelope.

Application for a passport should be made as early as possible when a trip is anticipated. Extra time should be allowed if a visa will be required from the country or countries to be visited.

Requests for expediting passports are sent to the Passport Services office that serves your region. At the end of this section is a list of all Passport Agency offices, along with Congressional and public phone numbers.

PASSPORT RENEWALS

If a passport has expired or is about to expire, a person can apply for a renewal by completing the Application for Passport by Mail (Form DSP-82). This form can be obtained from the authorized office in his or her area. To be eligible to use this application, the applicant must have been issued a U.S. Passport in his or her name within the past 15 years; must submit their most recent U.S. Passport with the application; and must have been age 16 or older when the most recent U. S. Passport was issued.

If the applicant meets the above requirements, the form should be completed and forwarded to the U. S. Passport Agency along with the most recent passport (it will be mailed back to applicant with the new passport), two new passport photos, and the renewal fee of \$55 made payable to U. S. Passport Services (again, do not send cash). Unlike other passport application forms, this form does not have to be signed by an authorized passport agent. See *Contacts* for the address to send passport renewals.

If the previous passport is more than 15 years old or was issued prior to the applicant's 16th birthday, the applicant must follow the procedures for a new passport. The applicant can use the old passport as proof of citizenship rather than the certified birth certificate or original naturalization certificate.

The same process used to expedite a new passport should also be used to expedite a passport renewal.

LOST OR STOLEN PASSPORT

If a constituent needs to replace a lost or stolen passport, he or she must file an application for a new passport and attach a Form DSP-64 - *Statement Regarding Lost or Stolen Passport*.

CHANGE OF NAME

Form DSP-19 is used for Passport Amendment – for a change of name, to correct the descriptive data, to add visa supplement pages, or to extend the validity of a limited passport. For a name change or to correct descriptive data, documentary evidence must be submitted to support the request; for instance, a marriage certificate or certified court order. There is no fee for this service.

PASSPORT SEARCH

The Congressman's office is often asked to determine the status of an application that has been delayed but was not processed through the Congressman's office. In this case, a Passport Search Form will need to be completed.

After the form is completed, call the Passport Liaison Office for your region (see *Contacts*). Tell the liaison officer your name, the Congressman's name, and that

PASSPORTS - CONTINUED

you need to check the status of an application. You will be asked the applicant's name and date of birth, and the agent will then check the computer for the status of the application. If the application is showing on the computer and if the constituent is in a hurry for the passport, you can ask the liaison office to pull the application and expedite it, using the constituent's credit card for payment.

TRANSMITTAL OPTIONS

How quickly a passport is needed will determine the method of sending the application to the Passport Agency. If the application is not needed for 4 - 6 weeks, you can send it by regular mail. However, the passport office suggests using an overnight delivery service if the passport is needed within 2 - 3 weeks.

The Passport Office prefers Federal Express. This is not a guarantee that the passport will be received on time for prearranged travel plans, but it may be helpful in getting the application to the agency and back to the applicant in a timely manner.

When using overnight mail service, if a family is sending more than one passport application to the Passport Agency for processing, all applications may be sent in the same overnight envelope. However, anyone who wishes to have a passport returned by overnight mail must include a completed airbill and postage for each individual passport.

SENDING AN APPLICATION

Complete an airbill. Place the passport application and cover letter in the envelope; put the completed airbill and check made payable to *Federal Express* into the outside pocket, and deposit the envelope in a drop box or call Federal Express to pick it up. (Always make a copy of the check/money order and airbill to keep with the file in case a search is needed later.)

The Federal Express charges can be paid by personal check or money order (no cash), or the applicant may have a Federal Express account. He or she can use that account as long as they provide you with the account number and the name under which it is listed.

RETURN OPTIONS

If the completed passport is to be returned to the constituent by Federal Express, you will need to enclose a completed airbill and check/money order (no cash) in the correct amount for the return, made payable to *Federal Express*. Again, if the applicant has an account with Federal Express, be sure that the account number and name are on the airbill. The completed airbill and check/money order, stapled together, should be attached to the front of the sealed passport application and so noted in the cover memo to the Passport Agency. (Make a copy of the check/money order and airbill and keep with the file.)

The procedure varies slightly if a different overnight service is used to return the passport. For Express Mail, attach a stamped return envelope. For other carriers, enclose a check or money order for the correct amount or provide an account number, and also include a return envelope for mailing back to the applicant.

HAND-CARRYING APPLICATIONS

The Special Issuance Agency is an office in Washington that assists Congressional offices and authorized passport agents. In an emergency, you can arrange for an executed application to be hand-carried by the applicant or *authorized* third party to Special Issuance for processing. (This is rarely used and is very inconvenient.)

Fax a letter to the Special Issuance Agency alerting officials there that a constituent needs a passport application to be processed in this manner. Include all pertinent information about the applicant.

Third parties should have written authorization from the applicant. Example:

To Whom It May Concern:

I, _____, hereby designate
 _____ to act on my behalf
 for the purpose of obtaining passport services and
 any information necessary for that purpose.

 signature of applicant

Constituents can go to any Passport Agency office in person to have their application expedited. Contact the office ahead of time to get specifics on the procedure. Some offices require appointments.

VISAS

If a constituent needs a visa for the country to which he or she intends to travel, the constituent needs to contact his or her travel agent or the embassy of that country. Visa requirements are set and enforced by the government of each country; therefore, Congressional offices have no jurisdiction to request or expedite the issuance of a visa.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Full name as it appears on the application.
2. Mailing address.
3. Daytime phone number.
4. Date of birth (this is how the Passport Agency tracks applications).

PASSPORTS - CONTINUED

5. Departure date.
6. Destination (to determine if applicant will need a visa).
7. Copy of application.

CONTACTS

Your first point of contact will normally be the Passport Services office that serves your region. A complete listing of Passport Services offices follows.

Most passport applications that are hand-carried from a Congressional Office are handled by the Special Issuance Agency of Passport Services in Washington, D.C.

Special Issuance Agency
1111 19th Street NW, Suite 350
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202/955-0198
Fax: 202/955-0347

RENEWALS

Constituents can mail renewal applications to the address listed on the back of Form DSP-82. If the renewal needs to be expedited, follow the submittal instructions for a new passport and send it to your regional office.

For inquiries about renewals sent to Pittsburgh, contact:

National Passport Center
31 Rochester Avenue
Portsmouth, NH 03801-2900
Phone: 603/334-0525

REGIONAL PASSPORT OFFICES

BOSTON Passport Agency
Thomas P. O'Neill Federal Building
10 Causeway Street, Suite 247
Boston, MA 02222-1094
Congressional Phone: 617/565-7210
Fax: 617/565-7197
Status Checks: 617/565-7195
Public Phone: 617/878-0900

CHICAGO Passport Agency
Kluczynski Federal Building
230 S. Dearborn Street, Suite 380
Chicago, IL 60604-1564
Congressional Phone: 312/341-8870
Fax: 312/341-8875
Status Checks: 312/341-6060
Public Phone: 312/341-6020

HONOLULU Passport Agency
300 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 1-330
Honolulu, HI 96850
Congressional Phone: 808/529-6565
Fax: 808/522-8243
Status Checks: 808/529-6565
Public Phone: 808/522-8283

HOUSTON Passport Agency
Mickey Leland Federal Building
1919 Smith Street, Suite 1400
Houston, TX 77002-8049
Congressional Phone: 713/655-2153
Fax: 713/655-2120
Status Checks: 713/655-2112
Public Phone: 713/751-0294

LOS ANGELES Passport Agency
Federal Building
11000 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1000
Los Angeles, CA 90024-3615
Congressional Phone: 310/575-5741
Fax: 310/575-5729
Status Checks: 310/575-5741
Public Phone: 310/575-5700

MIAMI Passport Agency
Claude Pepper Federal Office Building
51 SW First Avenue, 3rd Floor
Miami, FL 33130-1680
Congressional Phone: 305/539-3641
Fax: 305/539-3660
Status Checks: 305/539-3674
Public Phone: 305/539-3600

PASSPORTS - CONTINUED

NEW ORLEANS Passport Agency
One Canal Place
365 Canal Street, Suite 1300
New Orleans, LA 70130-6508
Congressional Phone: 504/412-2640
Fax: 504/412-2622
Status Checks: 504/412-2699
Public Phone: 504/412-2600

NEW YORK Passport Agency
376 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014
Congressional Phone: 212/206-3041
Fax: 212/206-3029
Status Checks: 212/206-3041
Public Phone: 212/206-3500

PHILADELPHIA Passport Agency
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street, Room 103
Philadelphia, PA 19106-2970
Congressional Phone: 215/597-6672
Fax: 215/597-5970
Status Checks: 215/597-8024
Public Phone: 215/418-5937

SAN FRANCISCO Passport Agency
95 Hawthorne Street, 5th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901
Congressional Phone: 415/538-2741/2789
Fax: 415/538-2715
Public Phone: 415/538-2700

SEATTLE Passport Agency
Henry Jackson Federal Building
915 Second Avenue, Suite 992
Seattle, WA 98174-1091
Congressional Phone: 206/808-5740
Fax: 206/808-5718
Status Checks: 206/808-5739
Public Phone: 206/808-5700

STAMFORD Passport Agency
One Landmark Square
Broad and Atlantic Streets
Stamford, CT 06901-2667
Congressional Phone: 203/325-1803
Fax: 203/967-3741
Status Checks: 203/325-1989
Public Phone: 203/969-9000

WASHINGTON Passport Agency
1111 19th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20524
Congressional Phone: 202/955-0110
Fax: 202/955-0108
Status Checks: 202/955-0351
Public Phone: 202/647-0518

CHARLESTON Passport Center
1269 Holland Street
Charleston, SC 29405
Congressional Phone: 843/746-1686
Fax: 843/746-1747
Status Checks: 843/746-1681
Public Phone: 843/746-1681 (Brief recorded information. No public counter.)

NATIONAL Passport Center
31 Rochester Avenue
Portsmouth, NH 03801-2900
Congressional Phone: 603/334-0802
Fax: 603/334-0596
Status Checks: 603/334-0525
Public Phone: 603/334-0500 (Brief recorded information. No public counter.)

WEBSITES

Main Passport Agency website: www.travel.state.gov

Downloadable passport applications:
http://www.travel.state.gov/download_applications.html

POST OFFICE

The U.S. Postal Service is an independent agency, so its day-to-day operations are not under the direct jurisdiction of Congress. Casework involvement is limited.

In the early 1970's, what was once known as the Postal Department was reorganized by Congress as the U.S. Postal Service. The U.S. Postal Service is now an independent agency, and *Members of Congress have no direct jurisdiction over its day-to-day operations.*

However, constituents still regard the Postal Service as part of the federal government and will call on the Congressman whenever they have problems. Obviously, the most frequent complaints will be about lost or delayed mail. Constituents may also call or write about plans to close a post office, the condition of a post office building, postal rate increases, junk mail, or employment.

SERVICE PROBLEMS

It is good idea to build a relationship with Postmasters in your district, and make them your first point of contact for any complaints about service. Postmasters are usually willing to take corrective action to resolve any problems a constituent might have. Encourage constituents to contact the Postmaster directly before taking further action. For more serious or recurring problems, contact the District Office with jurisdiction over your area.

POSTAL FACILITIES

The Postal Service maintains a long-range plan to replace or update postal facilities, but funding shortages have caused many projects to be delayed. Contact the District Office to determine any plans or relay complaints.

RATE INCREASES

Constituent contacts about rates are usually treated as legislative/opinion cases, and are sent to the Member's Washington office for response.

JUNK / OFFENSIVE MAIL

Constituents can go to their local Post Office and complete a Form 2201. The Postal Service will then place the constituent's name on a list that is provided to direct mail companies. By law, these companies are subject to civil and criminal legal action if they mail to the constituent after the constituent's name has been on the list for at least 30 days. The Direct Mail Marketing Association also provides a similar service (see *Contacts*).

POST OFFICE - CONTINUED

MAIL FRAUD

In cases of suspected mail fraud, the constituent's local post office can put the constituent in contact with the Postal Inspection Service.

POSTAL EMPLOYMENT

The Postal Reorganization Act prohibits Members of Congress from intervening in the employment process of the Postal Service. Even a simple letter of recommendation from the Congressman can, in fact, be detrimental to the applicant's chances of employment.

In matters of complaints by postal employees about working conditions, mistreatment, failure to get a promotion, etc., instruct the constituent to utilize the grievance and arbitration procedures available to them as the result of agreements between the Postal Service and the major unions representing the employees.

INFORMATION TO GET

Completed Case Sheet.

CONTACTS

The local Postmaster, District Office, or USPS Liaison Office in Washington.

U.S. Postal Service
Government Relations Department
475 L'Enfant Plaza, Room 10802
Washington, DC 20260
Phone: 202/268-3747
website: www.usps.gov

Direct Mail Marketing Association
6 East 23rd Street
New York, NY 10017
website: www.the-dma.org/consumers/offmailinglist.html

PRISONS

Congressmen have no jurisdiction over state prisons, where most inmates are located. Only limited assistance can be provided for federal inmates.

Most constituents contacting a congressional office concerning a prison matter will be members of the family of an inmate. You must have a written request for assistance from the inmate before you can proceed. An inmate may be requesting a reduction in sentence, a transfer to another facility or a half-way house, or may want to register a complaint concerning alleged improper treatment. He or she may want a copy of a sentencing rule.

A Congressman has no jurisdiction over state prisons, and can provide only limited assistance – usually just information – in federal prison cases.

REDUCTION IN SENTENCE

A Congressman does not have jurisdiction over the legal system or court decisions. It is not advisable to become involved in a request for a reduction in sentencing because no one can be sure of the behavior of a person once he or she has been released. Explain that the Congressman has no jurisdiction over decisions of the court.

If an inmate requests assistance in gaining a reduction in sentence, you can provide him or her with a copy of *Rule 35*, the federal regulation outlining the process and requirements for sentence reductions. You can obtain a copy of *Rule 35* by contacting the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Provide a copy of the rule to the inmate.

TRANSFERS

If the request for a transfer to another federal facility is a lateral move (i.e. from a medium custody facility to another medium custody facility) for the purpose of being closer to family, you can contact the Congressional Liaison Office of the Federal Bureau of Prisons on behalf of the inmate. Request that an application be forwarded to the constituent. It is the constituent's responsibility to follow the instructions and complete the request.

However, if the requested move would involve an upgrade of status (i.e. from medium to minimum), it is best to tell the inmate that the Congressman has no jurisdiction because it involves a decision of the court.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Completed Case Sheet.
2. Authorization Form or letter from inmate.
2. Registry number of the inmate. Date of birth and Social Security number may also be needed.
3. Address of residence before incarceration. (Home of record)
4. Location where sentencing occurred.

CONTACTS

Federal Bureau of Prisons
Congressional Liaison Office
320 First Street NW
Washington, DC 20534
Phone: 202/514-9663 or 202/307-3198 (Public Affairs)
Fax: 202/514-5935
website: www.bop.gov

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural Development is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The agency has programs that help with housing, community facilities, and infrastructure.

Rural Development (RD) offers loans and grants for rural housing programs, community facilities programs, business and industry programs, and area development assistance programs.

Guidelines for qualifying for assistance and specific services RD can provide through its programs change frequently because of regulatory adjustments within the agency and changes dictated by agricultural bills. Consequently, it is usually necessary to contact RD officials about constituents' questions to make sure you are providing an accurate answer.

This section will provide a broad outline of RD programs and services.

HOUSING PROGRAMS

RD administers several housing programs, some of which are single family housing programs, home ownership loans, very low income repair loans, home repair grants for the elderly, and weatherization loans. Most housing programs are handled or at least initiated through local agencies.

Many RD housing loans are offered at a low interest rate and, consequently, the borrower is required to show a need to use RD as a lender and the ability to repay the loan.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The community and facility service programs offered by RD are water and waste disposal grants and loans, facility grants, watershed/flood protection, and resource conservation and development loans.

RD community facility programs are directed toward rural communities of up to 10,000 people. Eligible applicants include municipal governments, county governments, public service districts, other non-federal public bodies, Indian tribal organizations, and broadly based non-profit community organizations.

In responding to questions and concerns involving community facility programs, you will need to deal with the RD district office in your area.

BUSINESS & INDUSTRY PROGRAMS

RD programs related to business and industry are limited to business and industry loan guarantees and industrial development grants. These programs

RURAL DEVELOPMENT - CONT'D

are designed to encourage economic growth in rural areas. Specific information about either program may be secured from a county or district RD office. Applications for the programs may also be filed with either office.

AREA DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Area development assistance programs consist of planning grants and energy-impacted area development assistance. These programs are designed to help meet the cost of comprehensive planning in rural areas. Any rural community can apply for a planning grant. Specific information can be obtained from a district office.

Energy-impacted area development assistance is designed for rural communities that are experiencing a sudden surge in population because of uranium or coal production activities. To be considered for this grant, a community must be designated as an energy-impacted area by the governor of the state. The governor's office works with the community and RD to determine if this grant will be offered.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Constituent's name, address, and phone number.
2. A signed Authorization Form.
3. A completed case sheet that outlines the constituent's questions and concerns in detail, with particular attention to the type of RD service the constituent wants.

CONTACTS

Your most frequent contact with RD officials will be through the county and district offices within the congressional district. Contact Rural Development's Congressional Liaison for the location of the RD office that serves your district.

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Rural Development
Congressional Liaison Office
Room 4171, MS 0705
South Building
14th and Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250
Phone: 202/720-6582
website: www.rurdev.usda.gov

SCHEDULING

The scheduling procedure will differ depending on the wishes of the Congressman. However, there are some basic principles you can follow to make things run smoothly.

Typically, scheduling for the Congressman is handled by the Scheduling Director in Washington, although this may vary from office-to-office. Most experienced staff members will agree that having two scheduling coordinators – one in the district and one in Washington – is a recipe for disaster. The following guidelines describe a typical operation with the Scheduling Director located in Washington.

Constituents often request to meet with the Congressman or invite him to attend or participate in a certain function. The Scheduling Director will work with the district staff in scheduling district events. Input from the district staff is very important in deciding which events to attend, or whether a staff member should attend in the Congressman's absence.

Never promise that the Congressman can make a certain meeting or that you can set-up an appointment quickly.

The type of information you need to get will vary, depending on whether you are dealing with an appointment request or an event invitation. An *Information to Get* section is provided for each.

APPOINTMENTS

Constituents will request an appointment with the Congressman in the District or in the Washington office. Try to determine if there is anything a caseworker can start working on before the constituent meets with the Congressman. In some cases the problem can be solved by the caseworker, thus freeing up time for the Congressman.

If a meeting with the Congressman is still needed or requested, advise the constituent that someone will be in touch to arrange a meeting the next time the Congressman is available. If the meeting is to be held in Washington, a time and date will have to be arranged between the Congressman and the Scheduling Director. The Scheduling Director will advise district staff when meetings will be held in the district, and then coordinate a schedule with a designated district staff member.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Name and address of the person or group requesting the meeting.

SCHEDULING - CONTINUED

2. Daytime telephone number.
3. Purpose of the meeting.
4. If more than one person is to attend, try to determine the number of people who will be attending and their names.

Complete a Scheduling Sheet with the above information and transmit it to the Washington office. Make a copy for the District Office file and send the original to the Scheduling Director.

INVITATIONS

Members of Congress are often invited to attend or participate in certain functions or to give a speech. These requests are also handled by the Scheduling Director. If you receive the invitation by phone, fully complete a Scheduling Sheet. If the invitation arrives by mail or in person, transmit it to the Washington office, make a copy for the District Office file, and send the original to the Scheduling Director.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Event that the Congressman is invited to.
2. The date of the event. In some cases, more than one date may be given, allowing the Congressman flexibility in scheduling an appearance or appointment. Write this down so that the Scheduling Director can consult the Congressman to determine which date would be best.
3. The time of the event.
4. Location where event will take place, along with an address, directions, and phone number.
5. Name, mailing address, and phone number of the person making the invitation.
6. Any other information that may be helpful to the Scheduling Director and the Congressman; for instance, a specific speech topic that the Congressman is requested to cover; if a meal is included in the event; proper attire, etc.

Complete a Scheduling Sheet with the above information and transmit it to the Washington office. Make a copy for the District Office file and send the original to the Scheduling Director.

SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

The SBA provides assistance to small businesses and those interested in starting them. There are also many local resources.

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is the federal agency responsible for assisting small businesses in a number of ways, from financial assistance to government contracting.

Many constituents will call requesting a government grant for the purpose of starting a new business or expanding an existing one. *The federal government has no such grant programs.* Financial assistance through the SBA is generally limited to loan guarantees.

The SBA also offers a wide array of publications and counseling for small businesses. An especially helpful publication is the Business Startup Packet, which will be mailed directly to a constituent upon request and is also available online. It may be helpful to keep a supply of these at the congressional office.

LOANS

SBA loan programs are for small business owners or prospective owners who meet the eligibility requirements and who cannot borrow from a bank or other conventional lender on reasonable terms.

Guaranty Loans are made through traditional lending institutions and secured by the SBA. These programs are the primary source of SBA lending. Detailed information about the various guaranty programs can be found on the SBA website at <http://www.sba.gov/financing/indexloans.html>.

A couple of Direct Loan programs are still technically in existence, but they haven't been funded in recent years.

SCORE

Many communities also have a chapter of **SCORE**, the Service Corps of Retired Executives. SCORE, sponsored by the SBA, provides counseling to businesses by retired executives with expertise in many fields. Often, the counseling is free, but there may be a minimal fee, depending on the business's ability to pay. The SBA can put you in touch with a SCORE representative in your area.

States, local governments, cooperatives, and universities may also have programs to assist small businesses. These will vary from state to state. The SBA office that serves your district can help you identify these programs.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING

The SBA offers excellent counseling, education, and marketing assistance to help small businesses sell products and services to government buyers. The agency will even organize seminars to instruct interested businesses in the fundamentals of selling to the government.

INFORMATION TO GET

Completed case sheet.

CONTACTS

The nearest SBA District Office. Call the SBA Congressional Liaison Office in Washington for the location of the office that serves your area.

U.S. Small Business Administration
Congressional Liaison Office
409 3rd Street SW
Washington, DC 20416
Phone: 202/205-6700
website: www.sba.gov

SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Most social programs are statewide programs administered by local agencies. Some of the programs are federally-funded, and your casework will involve those.

Most public assistance programs are administered by local Social Services agencies or by the state government itself.

These agencies handle programs as diverse as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (formerly AFDC), Child Support (see *Child Support* section in this manual), Medicaid, Food Stamps, Youth Services, Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Adoption, and a number of others. (Housing assistance is covered in the *HUD* section of this manual.)

Some of these are federal programs administered by the state, and it is permissible for a Congressional office to handle cases in these categories. Other programs described are purely state programs, and you may choose to refer constituents who experience problems with these programs to a state legislator or directly to the agency.

MEDICAID / HEALTHCARE

Medicaid is a federally funded program, administered by the states, that is designed to assist with the medical needs of low income individuals. Rules and application procedures vary greatly around the country, so you will need to determine the application procedures and contacts for your state.

Constituents may call and say they have recently moved to your state from another state where they were receiving Medicaid benefits, but they do not qualify under the rules of your state. Explain that income limitations are set by the individual states.

Other healthcare related programs:

COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

The Community Alternative Program (CAP) is a program through Medicaid that provides for in-home nursing care of a patient. The patient must be unable to perform the normal functions of daily self care.

MATERNAL AND CHILD CARE

From time to time you may have a case that involves a minor child who is disabled and needs full time care in the home because the parent or parents choose not to place the child in an institution. Many of these cases involve

SOCIAL PROGRAMS - CONTINUED

single parent families. Check with the Social Services agency for any programs in your area that apply to this situation. If the parents have applied for SSI benefits through the Social Security Administration, you should refer the case to the Social Security caseworker in your office.

TANF (FORMERLY AFDC)

In most places, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is the only social program that issues an actual monthly check to qualified recipients. It is a federal program which is administered by the states. (When people mention the term “welfare,” this is the program to which they are usually referring.) A constituent applies for TANF benefits through the appropriate Social Services agency in his or her area. Benefits can be approved for any family with dependent children if the total household income falls below the national poverty level and certain other requirements are met. In some cases, benefits are available if there is a handicapped child or disabled adult in the family. Determine the agency which administers TANF in your area to find the appropriate contact for cases of this type.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Name (also name of child, if applicable), address, phone number and date of birth, if applicable.
2. For Medicaid cases: Total income of household. This includes earned or unearned income of all persons living in the household at the time of application.
3. Number of minor children in the household.
4. Social Security number of Medicaid applicant.
5. Authorization Form. (May be required by some DSS offices)

FOOD STAMPS

Constituents may contact the congressional office and say that they have very little or no income. They may also have minor children in the home and are having a difficult time providing enough food to feed the family. Determine the appropriate office within your state or county that is responsible for Food Stamp applications and determinations.

If a constituent contacts the Congressman’s office and says that he or she has been denied Food Stamps, you should first ask the reason for the denial. Most often it is because the maximum income level for a household was exceeded. There are certain conditions under which some of the income may count against the maximum income level. If you or the constituent think there is a possibility that the application should be reviewed, you can offer to contact the appropriate

agency on his or her behalf.

Because of income ceilings, you may be contacted by disgruntled constituents who complain that they only qualified for a very small amount of Food Stamps per month. The only thing you can do is to explain the income requirements and offer to have someone from the appropriate office to review the application on behalf of the constituent.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Completed Case Sheet.
2. Number of people in household.
3. Total household income.
4. Household members receiving disability benefits.
5. Ages of minor children.
6. Other types of public assistance the family may be receiving.

OTHER CATEGORIES

ADOPTIONS

The adoption process is often slow and frustrating, but there is very little a Congressional office can do. If the case involves a child from another country, refer to the *Immigration* section of this manual.

DEPENDENT CARE FACILITIES

This category deals with licensing and regulation of nursing homes, child daycare centers, group homes, etc. It is generally a state responsibility.

MENTAL HEALTH/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Questions and requests may involve alcoholism, drug abuse, or mental disorders. Most local governments have a Mental Health Center or similar facility.

YOUTH SERVICES

Some cases will involve troubled young people, including cases of delinquency, truancy, or violence. Again, programs in this area are generally administered by the states.

CONTACTS

The appropriate local or state agency with jurisdiction over the program in question.

SECTION

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SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security generates the largest caseload in many Congressional offices. Cases will involve both retirement and disability benefits.

Social Security casework covers all of the programs administered by the Social Security Administration. Constituents become concerned when they are unable to get the benefits they feel they have worked for all of their lives and they will call on the Congressman for assistance.

It is important that constituents understand the Congressman can only make inquiries, help them through the process, and try to keep the claim moving through the system as it should. *The Congressman cannot ask that the Social Security Administration approve a claim; that decision is made by the SSA based on the facts of the case.*

Constituents should be encouraged to always comply with requests for information from the Social Security Administration, make sure they comply with any deadlines and appointments, and to take advantage of their right to appeal an adverse decision. Many times, with additional development of the case at the next level, a favorable decision can be reached.

Many people, unfortunately, are under the impression that Social Security was intended to meet all of their needs when they retire or become disabled, as well as to provide benefits for their families. This is not the case, but every effort should be made to determine if constituents are receiving the correct amount of benefits, or if they are entitled to file for additional benefits.

Social Security cases will involve one or more of the following: retirement benefits; disability benefits (Title II); Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits (Title XVI); spouse's/children's benefits; survivor's benefits; missing benefits; or under/overpayment of benefits.

Included in this section are numerous references to letters that should be sent to constituents and different SSA offices. Examples of some of these letters are at the end of the section.

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DISABILITY CLAIMS

Social Security disability programs can be very complicated. Success in assisting a constituent will sometimes depend on finding the right person to contact within the Social Security Administration (SSA). The Social Security office where the constituent files a claim is the first resource; and, depending on the information needed, other contacts can be made to the office in your state under contract with the Social Security Administration to make the initial determination on disability claims (usually called Disability Determination Services) and again if a request for reconsideration is filed; the Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA); the Appeals Council (AC); the Program Service Center responsible for a particular Social Security number (SSN); the Office of Disability Operations (ODO) in Baltimore; and the Regional Office of the Social Security Administration.

There are four steps in the Social Security process:

- 1) initial claim
- 2) reconsideration
- 3) administrative law judge hearing through the OHA
- 4) Appeals Council review.

Following is the action to be taken on typical Social Security disability cases from the initial contact after the constituent has filed a claim with the Social Security Administration.

DISABILITY, TITLE II

The Social Security disability program, Title II of the Social Security Act, provides benefits for workers who have disabilities that are expected to be permanent or to keep them out of *any* work for at least 12 months. SSA has a very strict definition of disability, one that is probably more stringent than the claimant's doctors or his employer's disability insurance carrier. If a worker has dependents, benefits may also be paid to them if the claim is approved. Inquiries will be made by constituents who need help in understanding the process, and also those who have had claims denied.

Entitlement to benefits begins five full months after the onset date. In other words, there are two important dates: the onset date (date the person became disabled as determined by SSA) and the date of entitlement (date of eligibility for benefits).

You will want to determine the type of health problems the constituent is experiencing. Work-related injuries may involve workmen's compensation benefits which would cause an offset (reduction of benefits) of the SSA disability benefits. Some Department of Veterans Affairs benefits may also be subject to an offset. Some health problems, such as a stroke or heart problems, can cause a claim to be deferred for up to three months at DDS before any action is taken.

The Congressman does not request medical records; he only suggests that the claimant make sure all records are provided to the SSA and that the claimant

makes sure that SSA is provided with up to date medical information, should his condition change during the process.

COBRA AND MEDICARE

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1989 (OBRA '89) extended from 18 months to 29 months the maximum period of coverage for COBRA beneficiaries (see *COBRA* section of this manual) who receive a disability determination from the Social Security Administration (SSA) with an onset date on or before the date of the qualifying event. However, the determination must be made before the 18 month standard COBRA coverage expires. The OBRA extension is often vitally important to the COBRA beneficiary because it bridges the gap in coverage between the time the disability determination is made and the date the disabled person becomes eligible for Medicare coverage.

Delays in the disability determination process can result in the beneficiary missing the deadline for the additional coverage. The U.S. Department of Labor Pension and Welfare Benefits Administration (PWBA) which is responsible for enforcing COBRA regulations, can ask SSA to issue a disability determination prior to the OBRA deadline. Although there is no guarantee that SSA will be able to comply with each request, this step does help improve the beneficiary's chances of making the deadline. To make the request, PWBA needs to know the beneficiary's name, social security number, the date the disability claim was filed, the date the COBRA coverage will expire, and which SSA office currently has the claim. Give SSA as much time as possible before the COBRA expiration date.

The referral to PWBA should be handled by your office's COBRA caseworker. However, you will want to coordinate your handling of the matter with the SSA caseworker since your inquiry with SSA will largely mirror the PWBA request. For more information on OBRA '89 and COBRA, see the *COBRA* section of this guidebook.

INFORMATION TO GET – TITLE II DISABILITY CASES

1. Name, address, telephone number, Social Security number, and date of birth of the claimant.
2. Authorization form signed by the claimant.
3. Type of benefits applied for, i.e.: disability on their own work record; as a disabled widow/widower (*in this case, you will need to get spouse's name, Social Security number, date of birth and date of death*); or for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.
4. How long it has been since the claimant last worked.
5. Does the claimant have a spouse or dependent children?
6. At which Social Security office the person filed the claim and the date (or approximate date) the claim was filed. Ask if he or she has heard anything from SSA since the claim was filed.

CONTACTS AND PROCEDURES

The first contact should be with the Social Security office where the claim was

SOCIAL SECURITY - CONTINUED

filed. Ask to be advised when or if the claim is forwarded to the DDS.

Send a letter to the DDS (mail, fax, or e-mail) when you learn the case has been sent there. The state agency will usually send an interim response to let you know they have received the inquiry and have noted the Congressman's interest.

Most DDS offices call to advise when the decision has been made and what the decision is, and then may send a letter within a few days.

If the decision is *favorable*, send the constituent a copy of the decision letter, if available, along with a letter advising that the DDS has completed action, and that he or she will be hearing from SSA about the decision and close the case. (These are only **recommended** decisions by the DDS and must be approved by SSA before the decision is final. Some claims are randomly picked to be further reviewed at the Regional Office in your area, and occasionally one is returned to the DDS for further development. This sometimes results in a new decision that is not favorable.)

RECONSIDERATION

If the decision is *unfavorable*, send a copy of the letter, if available, to the constituent with a letter advising that he or she can request *reconsideration*. A claimant is given sixty days to appeal the decision. If you are notified that an appeal was filed, send another interest letter to the DDS.

If the reconsideration is *approved*, send a letter to the constituent advising him or her of the approval and close the case. If the reconsideration decision is a *denial*, send a copy of the letter to the constituent and advise that the next level of appeal is to request a *hearing* before an administrative law judge, which must be done within 60 days of the claimant's denial letter date.

ALJ HEARING

If the constituent requests a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ), write to the constituent, then write a letter to the Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA). The OHA does not always send interim letters, but they usually provide a weekly or biweekly update of your cases that can be faxed to you. You may have to call periodically to request the status of a case.

The sequence of events at OHA usually goes as follows: the case is placed on a master docket; it is assigned to an administrative law judge; the case is in work-up or being developed; ready to schedule; hearing date scheduled. After the hearing is held: in post hearing; with writers; in typing; in final; went to mail out; closed. *However, once the hearing has been held, OHA will only advise that the claim is still there and being processed. Rarely will they give specific information about the decision, except for where the claim is in the process, until OHA closes the claim.*

If the administrative law judge issues a *favorable* decision, send a letter to the constituent and close the case.

APPEALS COUNCIL REVIEW

If the claim is *denied* by the ALJ, send a copy of the denial notice (if available) to the constituent and explain that he or she can appeal to the Appeals Council within the sixty day time limit. Ask to be advised if an appeal is filed. You can also call the Appeals Council at 703/605-8000 to ask if a request for review has been received.

Some constituents or their attorneys will send a request for review directly to the Appeals Council rather than through the local SSA office. If the request for review is filed, write a letter to the constituent and then to the Appeals Council. The AC letter should be faxed to them at 703/605-8021. The Appeals Council will send interim responses.

If the review is denied, send a letter to the constituent and close the case. If the Appeals Council grants the request for review and remands the case to the OHA for further action, write to the constituent and contact OHA again.

OTHER COMMON PROBLEMS**PAYMENTS**

Occasionally, you will be asked to follow a claim through the payment process or check on the progress of the payment action. In this event, contact the Regional Office and ask the liaison office to check with the Office of Disability Operations (ODO) in Baltimore or the Program Service Center (PSC) for a status. You can also contact these offices directly for payment information. When action has been completed and payment information is furnished, send that information to the constituent in a letter and close the case.

ATTORNEYS FEES

If the claimant has an attorney, payment is automatically withheld. Legal fees are usually 25% (maximum of \$5,300 plus expenses) of any retroactive benefits due to the claimant and his or her dependents. The SSA and the attorney handle this process.

OFFSETS

An offset is a reduction in benefits caused by other benefits the claimant is receiving or has received in the past. An offset may be necessary if SSI benefits are involved; an offset will be made if workmen's compensation benefits are involved, or if previous overpayments have not been recovered.

There is a maximum amount payable from a person's work record; therefore, if a claimant receives the maximum amount, no benefits are available to be paid to dependents. This is called the *family maximum provision*. Refer to the SSA Handbook for more information.

SSI

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, Title XVI, is administered by the Social Security Administration, but benefits are paid out of the General Fund, rather than the Social Security allotted funds. This program is designed to assist the elderly or disabled – adults and children – who might not be covered under the Social Security disability and retirement programs.

Basically, the determination procedure for SSI disability claims is the same as it is for Title II medical disability claims. However, SSI benefit amounts are based on household income and resources if the claim is approved. SSI benefits are paid to the claimant only; there are no benefits for a spouse or children. Also, if SSI benefits are approved, they may or may not be paid retroactively.

A person can be determined to be medically eligible for disability benefits, but if he or she cannot meet the non-medical requirements (income and resources), no benefits can be paid.

If a notice of approval is received, send a letter to the constituent advising that the local SSA office will get in touch with him or her to update the non-medical portion of the claim file. The SSA office will then determine the claimant's eligibility to receive benefits and the amount. The case can then be closed.

If the claim for SSI disability benefits is denied, the appeal procedure is the same as for Title II disability claims.

At each level of an SSA disability claim, there is a 60 day time limit on filing for the next level. Internally, SSA gives the claimant an additional 5 days from the date of the denial letter for the letter to reach the claimant. If the deadlines are not met, a new claim must be started. If there is good cause for the delay (hospitalization, family death, etc.), contact the local SSA office to discuss the situation.

There can be two claims within SSA for the same claimant, each at a different level. Also there can be simultaneous claims of SSI and Title II. This generally occurs when the claimant has worked, but not long enough or at a pay rate that generates a benefit amount above the SSI benefit level. In those cases, SSI will be applied for at the same time as Title II to help the claimant's benefits reach the SSI level. Each entitlement must follow its own regulations although they will be processed at the same time.

SSA does sometimes lose files. Encourage the constituent to make copies of forms filed with SSA and other important materials. It is usually not necessary to make copies of medical records as their doctor, if still in a medical practice, would have these on file.

INFORMATION TO GET – SSI CASES

1. Name, address, telephone number, Social Security number, and date of birth of the claimant.

2. Authorization form signed by the claimant.
3. Other income in the household, such as VA benefits, spouse's employment or benefits, or children in the home who are employed or receive benefits.
4. Number of people in the household and their relationship to the claimant, including dependent children.

CONTACTS

The Social Security office where the claim was filed is the best point of contact.

RETIREMENT CLAIMS

Most SSA retirement claims involve problems in getting the benefits started; the amount of the monthly benefits; penalty for failure to file an income report on a timely basis if the claimant continues to work; or if the constituent is self-employed, having the claim denied. Retirement claims are handled initially by the local SSA office and then sent for payment to the Program Service Center responsible for that Social Security number.

Some people apply for reduced retirement benefits before age 65. The SSA can determine what the reduction in benefits will be.

People ages 62-65 who continue to work after retirement will automatically have their benefits recalculated each year. Each year, a notice is sent to the claimant reminding him or her of the amount of estimated income last given to SSA. Differences in actual earnings versus estimated income should be reported to SSA as soon as possible. Reporting these differences is the responsibility of the beneficiary.

INFORMATION TO GET – RETIREMENT CLAIMS

1. Completed Case Sheet including name, address, telephone number, Social Security number, and date of birth of the claimant (or spouse, if applicable.)
2. Authorization Form signed by the claimant.
3. Date when the claimant retired, and date he or she filed for benefits.
4. The SSA office where application was made. Some applications can now be filed through the SSA website.
5. Any notices that have been received from the SSA.

CONTACTS

Contact the local SSA office to check on the status of a claim and to determine which Program Service Center (PSC) will handle it. The inquiry about the case should be made to the appropriate PSC.

MISSING BENEFITS

Unfortunately, some people fail to receive their monthly benefits and it can be very upsetting for them. Checks are sometimes stolen from their mailboxes, their ben-

SOCIAL SECURITY - CONTINUED

efits have been suspended by the SSA (sometimes in error), or if they are on Direct Deposit and the benefits fail to reach the bank or are not deposited in their accounts. People also sometimes fail to notify the SSA of a change of address, or of their desire to cancel the Direct Deposit, in time to get the record changed before the next month's benefits are sent out. When it is necessary to make changes on a record, it is best to give 4-6 weeks lead time. This allows SSA to make those changes with as little disruption as possible to the constituent.

Beneficiaries receiving benefits prior to May, 1997 receive those benefits on the third of the month (adjusted for weekends and federal holidays). For example, benefits for January arrive February 3rd. After May, 1997 benefit payment cycles are determined by the claimant's birthdate.

Birthdates from: 1-10 are paid the second Wednesday of the month
 11-20 are paid the third Wednesday of the month
 21-31 are paid the fourth Wednesday of the month

SSI checks are slated for delivery on the first of each month, also adjusted for weekends and holidays.

If benefits have been suspended by SSA, you will need to find out why the payment was not sent by contacting the appropriate SSA office. It is usually best to start with the local SSA office.

If a constituent's benefits are late, he or she should file a non-receipt report with the local SSA office. Once this report has been filed, SSA can provide important information about the check that the Treasury Department will need in order to assist you. (See *Contacts* below for more information.)

The Treasury Department will proceed as follows:

- If the inquiry is about a paper check and the check is still outstanding, Treasury will enter a stop payment order and advise SSA to reissue benefits.
- If the check has been cashed, Treasury will send a photocopy of the front and back of the check to the local SSA office, accompanied by a form to verify that the signature on the check is not that of the claimant. Treasury will investigate the case and determine whether to notify the SSA to reissue benefits. If the check was cashed, this process can take several months. For this reason it is usually best to encourage Direct Deposit whenever possible.
- If Direct Deposit was used, Treasury will contact the bank to determine if the benefits were received and deposited in the account. If not, necessary action will be taken to reissue the benefits.

INFORMATION TO GET – MISSING BENEFITS

1. Name, address, telephone number, and Social Security number.
2. Authorization Form signed by the claimant.
3. What type of benefits the claimant receives (retirement, disability, etc. In the case of widow/widower's benefits, get the spouse's name and Social Security

number. In the case of a child, get the parent's name and SSN that the child draws benefits on.)

4. The SSA office where the non-receipt report was filed.
5. Any notices that have been received from the SSA.
6. The following information about the check or deposit:
 - date the check or deposit should have arrived
 - name and address on the check
 - amount of the check or deposit.
7. If the benefits were sent by Direct Deposit, get the name of the bank and account number, the routing number and whether it is a savings or checking account.

CONTACTS

After a non-receipt report has been filed, contact the local SSA office to get the following information about the check:

- On checks sent to the claimant: name on check, amount, check number, symbol number, date of check, SSN or claim number, current address, and the address the check was mailed to.
- On Direct Deposit: name of claimant, SSN or claim number, date of benefits, name of bank, account number, the routing number and whether it is a savings or checking account.

Once you obtain the necessary information, contact the Department of the Treasury as follows:

- Paper checks: Check Claims Congressional Staff: 202/874-7680
- Direct Deposit claims: 202/874-7328. This is an administrative department, but you will be given the correct telephone number depending upon the claimant's Social Security number.

OVERPAYMENTS

People often are overpaid because they have failed to notify the SSA about changes in their circumstances, such as returning to work while receiving disability benefits; failure to make earnings reports on a timely basis if they continue to work and receive retirement benefits; underestimating their next year's earnings; or changes in income and/or resources if they are receiving SSI benefits.

Also, SSA sometimes makes an error in calculating the amount of benefits a person receives. However, even if SSA made an error, the claimant has to repay any overpayment unless certain criteria are met. Refer to the SSA Handbook (or www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/handbook/ssa-hbk.htm) for more information. In an effort to have constituents receive benefits as quickly as possible, SSA frequently sends the benefits first, with the information regarding the benefits arriving later.

A *waiver* of the overpayment can be requested. Financial statements would have to be provided to the SSA to help determine the claimant's ability to repay the debt.

SOCIAL SECURITY - CONTINUED

If the waiver is denied, the person can then request to make the repayment through *partial withholding* from his or her monthly benefits rather than having the entire check withheld until the overpayment is recouped. The denial can also be appealed.

If the claimant is not currently receiving benefits, a repayment schedule can be worked out with the SSA or the repayment can be made in a lump sum. If repayment plans are not made or if an agreement is not kept, the U.S. Treasury will intercept any federal funds due to the claimant and apply them to the overpayment. This includes income tax refunds and Department of Veterans Affairs benefits. This is called TRO (Tax Refund Offset) and became effective with the 1991 tax year.

These decisions are made by the SSA, but the Congressman can ask that a claim be reviewed and every consideration be given to assist the claimant in resolving the problem. Encourage the constituent to cooperate with the SSA in providing any necessary information.

INFORMATION TO GET – OVERPAYMENTS

1. Name, address, telephone number, and Social Security number.
2. Authorization Form signed by the claimant.
3. The type of benefits that have been overpaid and the Social Security record from which the benefits were paid, if different from the claimant.
4. Any notices or correspondence the constituent has received from the SSA about the overpayment.
5. Ask if any action has been taken, such as filing for a waiver and/or partial withholding.

CONTACTS

Contact the local SSA office to obtain any additional information needed, such as filing of the waiver, status, etc.

The SSA office that sent the notices can also be contacted, as well as the Regional Office if necessary.

RESOURCE MATERIAL

- Social Security Handbook
- SSA website: www.ssa.gov
- SSA electronic newsletter: www.ssa.gov/enews/
- Social Security Administration Annual Report to Congress
- Social Security pamphlets available through local SSA offices and online
- Congressional Inquiries Guide – SSA
- Copies of laws dealing with Social Security matters and changes
- Newspaper articles about Social Security programs
- Info Packs from Congressional Research Service

SOCIAL SECURITY LETTER: AUTHORIZATION RETURNED

Date

Name
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Name:

I appreciate your returning the signed authorization form to request my assistance with your claim for Social Security disability benefits. I will be glad to assist you in every way that I can.

I have contacted the appropriate officials of the Social Security Administration to let them know of my interest in your claim, and to ask to be kept advised of developments as they occur.

You may be assured that I will be in touch with you again as soon as I receive any information.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx

SOCIAL SECURITY LETTER: INQUIRY WITH DDS

Date

Name, Title
State agency or Disability Determination Service
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

I have been contacted concerning the claim of:

Name of claimant
Address of claimant
Claimant's city, state and zip code
SSN

I want to express my interest on behalf of this constituent and ask to be kept advised of developments as they occur. Please send any information to my _____ District Office at _____ (Address) _____.

Thank you for your courtesy and assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx

SOCIAL SECURITY LETTER: DDS APPROVAL

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

I have been advised by the Disability Determination Services office that they have completed their evaluation of your disability claim and have made their recommended decision of approval to the Social Security Administration (SSA).

Since the recommendation is subject to review by the Social Security Administration, the decision is not final until you receive notification from the SSA. Hopefully it will not be too much longer before action will be completed on your claim.

I was glad to have the opportunity to assist you, and please let me know if I can be of further assistance on this or any other matter involving the federal government.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx

SOCIAL SECURITY LETTER: RECONSIDERATION DENIED

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

The Disability Determination Services in _____ has informed me that they recommended a denial on your claim for disability benefits following the reconsideration, and I regret the decision could not have been favorable. If you have not already received it, you will receive the official notification from the Social Security Administration about the decision.

You have the right to request a hearing before an administrative law judge, and I hope you will consider taking advantage of this right. It would be helpful to submit any additional medical evidence you might have available with your appeal which could help prove your disability. A hearing must be requested within sixty days of the date of the denial notice and this can be done through the local Social Security office.

Please let me know should you decide to pursue this course of action and I will be glad to continue my efforts on your behalf. Please advise my staff member, _____, after you have formally requested your hearing. _____ may be reached at _____.

I look forward to hearing further from you.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx

SOCIAL SECURITY LETTER: OHA INTERIM LETTER

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

I recently contacted the Social Security Administration's Office of Hearings and Appeals in (city) again to request the current status of your claim. I was advised that a hearing date still has not been set by Judge (name) . Hopefully it will not be too much longer before further action can be taken.

You may be assured that I will continue to keep you advised.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx

SOCIAL SECURITY LETTER: APPEALS COUNCIL DENIAL

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

I have enclosed a copy of the letter I received recently from the Appeals Council of the Social Security Administration, and I was very sorry to learn that they have upheld the denial made by the Administrative Law Judge on your claim for disability benefits. I know how disappointing this decision must be for you. Although I did express my interest in your case, the final decision was made by the Social Security Administration.

As you have been advised, you have the right to take your case to the courts. If you choose this course of action, you must make your request within sixty days of the date of the denial notice. If you take your case to the courts, I would no longer have any jurisdiction since it would be of a legal nature and no longer within my jurisdiction as a Member of Congress. You might want to seek legal advice from an attorney.

Again, I very much regret this information is not more favorable. If I can assist you in the future, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx

enclosure

MEDICARE

Medicare is the federal health insurance program for senior citizens and certain disabled people. Enrollment is handled through the Social Security Administration.

Medicare is a federal health insurance program for people 65 or older and certain disabled people. It is run by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Social Security Administration offices take applications for Medicare and provide general information about the program.

There are two parts to the Medicare program. **Hospital Insurance (Part A)** helps pay for inpatient hospital care, some inpatient care in a skilled nursing facility, home health care, and hospice care. Part A has deductibles and coinsurance, but most people do not have to pay premiums for Part A.

Medical Insurance (Part B) helps pay for doctors' services, outpatient hospital services, durable medical equipment, and a number of other medical services and supplies that are not covered by the hospital insurance part of Medicare. Part B of Medicare has premiums, deductibles, and coinsurance amounts that a person is responsible to pay directly or through coverage by another insurance plan.

PART A CASEWORK

Medicare Part A cases usually involve failure to get hospital bills paid by Medicare. The hospital sends the bill directly to the *intermediary* that handles your state's Part A claims. The intermediary is a private insurance organization under contract to the federal government to handle Medicare payment for services by hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, hospices, outpatient rehabilitation providers, and home health agencies.

INFORMATION TO GET – PART A CASES

1. Completed Case Sheet, including all basic information about the claimant.
2. Authorization Form signed by the claimant.
3. It is helpful to get a copy of any letters or Explanation of Benefits forms the constituent has received from Medicare.
4. Be sure to get the health insurance claim # (HIC#). This number is usually the person's Social Security number unless he or she is entitled under a spouse's number.
5. The name of the hospital, the dates of service, and the amount of the bill if possible.

Write to the constituent and then write to the appropriate *intermediary*. Contact can also be made by telephone or fax.

PART B CASEWORK

These cases typically involve failure to get medical bills processed by the *carrier* that handles most Part B claims for your state. It could also involve a problem in getting a constituent's records updated with the carrier to show that Medicare is the primary coverage. The carrier is a private insurance organization that contracts with the federal government to handle claims from doctors and suppliers of services covered by Medicare medical insurance.

Ask the constituent if Medicare is his or her primary insurance. Some people are covered by the spouse's employer-provided insurance plan. This plan would usually be their primary insurance and Medicare would be secondary. In this case, the bills have to be submitted first to the primary carrier and then to Medicare. However, if the claimant is no longer covered by an employer group plan, you will need to get a copy of a letter from the former employer stating the date the group coverage terminated.

All medical claims have to be submitted to Medicare by the doctor and/or supplier, whether they accept assignment or not. Medicare pays 80% of the approved amount. If the constituent is not satisfied with the amount approved, an appeal can be filed, but there are deadlines for filing an appeal.

Durable Medical Equipment Claims are handled by regional offices called Durable Medical Equipment Regional Centers (DMERC). You will need to determine which Regional Center handles claims from your state. There may be several items that can be pre-approved by DMERC. Encouraging constituents to get pre-approval can save them money and speed a claim for the equipment. Contact DMERC to obtain the most up to date listing of equipment and procedure for the constituent.

INFORMATION TO GET – PART B CASES

1. Completed Case Sheet, including all basic information about the claimant.
2. Authorization Form signed by the claimant.
3. The HIC# (health insurance claim number).
4. A copy of any communication the constituent has received from Medicare about the claim.
5. The name of the doctor or supplier who provided the service. Also, get the date(s) of service and the amount of the bill.
6. If the claim has been denied, find out if the constituent has appealed the decision.

Write to the constituent and then write to the *carrier*. Contact can also be made by telephone.

CONTACTS

For Part A claims, contact the intermediary for your state.

For Part B claims, contact the carrier for your state.

For durable medical equipment claims (DME), contact the Durable Medical

Equipment Regional Center for your state.

You can also contact the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Regional Office serving your state. For the location of the appropriate CMS Regional Office, contact the CMS Congressional Liaison Office in Washington, DC.

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
Congressional Liaison Office
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201
Phone: 202/690-8220
CMS website: www.cms.hhs.gov
Medicare website: www.medicare.gov

RESOURCE MATERIAL

- The Medicare Handbook (one published each year by CMS)
- Bulletins from the carrier for your state
- Newspaper articles about the Medicare program
- Info Packs from the Congressional Research Service

SECTION

9

Department of Veterans Affairs 9 - 1

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Veterans of our armed services are entitled to extensive healthcare and other benefits. Unfortunately, the veterans healthcare system is not as efficient as it should be.

The Veterans Administration was created in 1930 and was elevated to the cabinet-level Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) in March of 1989. Its mission is to provide veterans and their families with a wide range of benefits, including healthcare, home loans, educational assistance, and pensions.

Eligibility is determined by a veteran's period of service, length of service, and type of discharge received. The DVA provides benefits to veterans through three primary agencies: the **Veterans Benefits Administration**, **Veterans Health Services and Research**, and the **National Cemetery System**. These topics and others are covered in detail in this section.

The DVA maintains a Congressional liaison office in Washington, DC. When a constituent contacts the Congressman requesting general information on the DVA or information which cannot be obtained from the Regional Office or any of the Medical Centers, this is the appropriate office to contact. See the *Contacts* section for the appropriate address and phone number.

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VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

This branch of the Department of Veterans Affairs deals with monetary benefits available to veterans such as disability compensation, pensions, educational and training programs, life insurance, death and widow's benefits, and loan guaranty programs. All claims from veterans and their dependents are initially processed at DVA Regional Offices (DVARO), which are located throughout the country.

DISABILITY CLAIMS AND PENSIONS

Most inquiries from constituents will involve applications for service-connected disability benefits or pensions. (*Service-connected* means the injury or condition resulted directly from the veteran's military service.) Disability benefits are based on a percentage rating assigned by the DVA. As part of the claims process, the DVA will make a determination of how severely the veteran is disabled. The level of disability is expressed as a percentage, and will help determine the amount of benefits the veteran is due.

DVA pensions are an income supplement for veterans whose total household income falls below a certain amount. A veteran who meets the income criteria does not have to have a service-connected disability to qualify for pension benefits.

Veterans may file claims in several ways. They can get help from a local Veterans Service Officer, a Service Officer with a veterans organization such as the American Legion or Disabled American Veterans (DAV), or can request benefits in a letter to the DVA. The organizations mentioned above will help veterans complete the proper paperwork, and the organization or officer forwards this information to the DVARO for processing.

These same assistance options are available to family members of veterans when they are applying for benefits.

Veterans will contact the Congressional office when a problem arises with the application process or if the outcome of a claim is not as they had hoped. A claim must have already been filed by the veteran before a Congressional office can be of assistance. If a claim has not been filed, provide the veteran with the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the people in their area available to help them. Ask them to contact the Congressional office again when the claim has been filed.

Most often a letter from the Congressman is sent to the DVARO to advise the agency of the Congressman's interest in the veteran's claim. If the problem is of an urgent nature, or if it is relatively simple, the Congressional Inquiry unit (see *Contacts*) is the best point of contact. That office can also be called for updates on other cases you may have, for advice on how to handle cases, or for general information.

APPEALS

If the veteran disputes a decision on his or her claim, he or she can appeal. A phone call can be placed to the DVARO to find out the reasons for the denial, the basis for the disability rating, etc.

Often, further information from the veteran will be helpful to his or her appeal. Also, the Congressman can write a letter to the DVARO to express interest in the case. Although cases will be decided on merit alone, the DVARO will keep the Congressional office advised of the status of the appeal. A fact sheet on the appeals process is available on the DVA website and can be forwarded to the veteran.

If a claim has gone through all the appeals available at the DVARO level and is still denied, it is forwarded to the Board of Veterans Appeals in Washington, D.C. for further review. A letter should be sent to the BVA to let them know of the Congressman's continuing interest. Phone calls can be made to check the progress of the case. Cases sent to the BVA can take a year or longer to be resolved, due to the large numbers of cases being dealt with and the preparation involved in getting each case ready for consideration.

The Court of Veterans Appeals is the final level of appeal and has exclusive jurisdiction to review decisions of the BVA. To be eligible for review before the CVA, the original notice of disagreement must have been filed on or after November 18, 1988. Notice of appeal must be filed with the CVA within 120 days after the date on which the notice of a decision has been mailed by the Board of Veterans Appeals. When a case goes to the CVA, it becomes a legal matter and the congressional office has no further jurisdiction.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

Education and training benefits are available for eligible veterans under the Montgomery GI Bill. The most common problems you will be asked to address will be late benefit checks and disputes over the enrollment hours assigned to a veteran's calculation of benefits. Both problems are generally resolved easily by providing updated information to the appropriate DVA officials.

Educational benefits are handled out of many different DVARO offices. The type of benefit in question will determine where the case is handled. If a veteran calls with an educational problem, in addition to the basic information, you will need to find out what school he or she is attending, his or her status (full time, part time, etc.), and the period of attendance. If the educational benefits are for a child or other dependent of the veteran, information on the veteran *and* the student is needed. Begin the inquiry at the local DVARO, and that office will direct you from there.

LOAN GUARANTY PROGRAM

Loan Guaranty is an area in which you will probably not receive many questions, but the ones you will get will be quite complicated. Complicated cases are best handled in writing. Be sure to get all applicable documentation from the veteran. If the case is relatively simple, call the loan guaranty section at the DVARO. Many times that office will take the information and contact the veteran directly.

INFORMATION TO GET – BENEFITS CASES

1. The veteran's full name, address, phone number, date of birth, Social Security number, C# (claim number, if different from SSN), dates of service, and branch of military service.
2. If a wife, widow, or child is filing for benefits under the veteran's name, full information should also be taken on him or her.
3. A completed Authorization Form. If the veteran is deceased, get a signed Authorization Form from the widow. If the veteran is too ill or is incompetent, have the next of kin to sign the form.
4. Find out what benefits were being applied for, and how and when the claim was sent to the DVARO.
5. For cases involving educational benefits, a copy of the veteran's VA Form 22-1999 (Enrollment Certification) for the enrollment period(s) in question.

VETERANS HEALTH SERVICES

The Veterans Health Services and Research Administration is the branch of the DVA responsible for the DVA Medical Centers (DVAMC), outpatient clinics, nursing homes, domiciliaries, and readjustment counseling services. Most complaints in this area will be from veterans who were not satisfied with the treatment they did, or did not, receive at a DVA facility.

In dealing with veterans about medical problems, you will need to add two very important phrases to your vocabulary: *service-connected* and *non service-connected*. A service-connected condition is one which was incurred while in active service, such as a gunshot wound, frozen feet, loss of limbs, etc. Non service-connected conditions are medical problems which did not occur during and do not relate to active military service. Non service-connected conditions may or may not be eligible for treatment by the DVA.

HEALTHCARE ENROLLMENT PLAN

In 1998, the DVA instituted a new Healthcare Enrollment Plan for all veterans. It mandates that all veterans – service-connected or non service-connected – must enroll at a DVA Medical Center to qualify for DVA medical services. Veterans who had been treated at a DVA Medical Center in the year prior to the

onset date of the new healthcare plan were automatically enrolled, but all others must enroll to qualify for healthcare services.

Veterans are classified according to their service-connected disability rating, with priority given to those veterans classified with a 50% or higher service-connected classification. If you are in an area that is heavily populated with veterans, it would be helpful to forge a relationship with the nearest DVAMC's congressional contact because you will probably have a steady flow of cases.

DVA NURSING HOMES

Many times families will contact the Congressman's office when they are trying to get the veteran into a DVA nursing home. The nursing homes are located on DVAMC grounds. The waiting lists for such facilities is long in some parts of the country. DVAMC contacts are happy to help with advice on how best to handle these cases.

CHAMPVA / DEERS

The Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) is a medical benefits program through which the DVA helps pay the cost of care received from sources outside the DVA system for eligible veterans and dependents. Eligible persons include the spouse and children of a veteran who was killed while on active duty, died as a result of a service-connected disability, or is totally disabled as a result of a service-connected disability. Participants must be registered on the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting Service (DEERS).

INFORMATION TO GET – HEALTHCARE CASES

1. Completed Case Sheet, including which DVA Medical Center (DVAMC) he or she visited, whether or not it was a scheduled appointment, in what clinic in the facility he or she was seen, and the names of the doctors involved.
2. A signed Authorization Form.
3. Any pertinent documents.

MEMORIAL PROGRAMS

The National Cemetery System administers 114 national cemeteries in 38 states and Puerto Rico. *Allowances* for burial and *allowances* for a headstone or grave marker are available for eligible veterans when the survivors purchase these items from local sources. Headstones and grave markers can also be obtained directly from the National Cemetery System.

Grave markers are now available to all eligible veterans, even if the gravesite already has a headstone. It is now permissible to place a military grave marker

at the foot of a veteran's grave.

Most often, the funeral director takes care of all applications for these benefits. Occasionally, funeral home directors will contact the Congressman's office complaining that the ordered headstone or grave marker has not arrived or is incorrect. These problems can be resolved by a phone call to the Office of Memorial Programs.

INFORMATION TO GET – MEMORIAL PROGRAMS CASES

1. Completed Case Sheet.
2. Date of death.
3. Name, address, and phone number of the funeral home and directors.

NATIONAL PERSONNEL RECORDS CENTER

The **National Personnel Records Center** (NPRC) is the central repository of military records. Veterans will contact their Congressman when they need copies of prior military service records such as a DD-214, discharge paper, medical records, and the 201 file (personnel file). Constituents requesting such materials should be sent a Standard Form 180 (you can get a supply from the DVARO) and an authorization form. Once the completed forms are returned, they should be sent to the NPRC for processing. The requested information will be sent to the Congressman's office and should be forwarded to the constituent.

A massive fire at the NPRC in the early 1970's resulted in the destruction of millions of valuable records. If records destroyed in the fire are needed, the military can reconstruct them with information from various other sources. However, the ability to reconstruct the records is limited.

CONTACTS

DVA LIAISON OFFICE - WASHINGTON

Ms. Patricia Covington, Chief
House Liaison Staff
Department of Veterans Affairs
B-328 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
Phone: 202/225-2280
Fax: 202/453-5225
website: www.va.gov

DVA REGIONAL OFFICES (DVARO)

Contact the DVA Congressional Liaison office in Washington for the location of the DVARO that serves your district. A listing of DVARO's can also be found in the publication entitled *Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents* (see *Resource Materials*).

DVA MEDICAL CENTERS (DVAMC)

Contact the DVA Congressional Liaison office in Washington for the location of the DVAMC that serves your district. A listing of DVAMC's can also be found in the publication entitled *Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents* (see *Resource Materials*).

MEMORIAL PROGRAMS

Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Memorial Programs
PO Box 50420
Washington, DC 20091-0420
Phone: 202/565-4252
Fax: 202/565-7967
Public: 1-800-697-6947

BOARD OF VETERANS APPEALS

Mr. Jim Jensen, Director
Board of Veterans Appeals
Department of Veterans Affairs
811 Vermont Avenue
Washington, DC 20420
Phone: 202/565-5001
Fax: 202/565-6364

CHAMPVA

Director
CHAMPVA
PO Box 65023
Denver, CO 80206-9023
Phone: 1-800-733-8387
Fax: 303/331-7804
e-mail: ha.in@med.va.gov
website: www.va.gov/hac/champva/champva.html

VETERANS - CONTINUED

DEERS

DEERS Support Office
400 Gigling Road, 5th Floor
Seaside, CA 93955
Phone: 831/583-2500
Fax: 831/655-8317
Public: 1-800-538-9552
website: www.tricare.osd.mil/

RESOURCE MATERIALS

Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents. This booklet is published by the DVA and is available from any DVA Regional Office. A new edition is published each year.

SECTION

10

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TRANSPORTATION

The U.S. Department of Transportation handles issues such as interstates and aviation. Many of your inquiries will involve local issues, and you should refer them on.

The primary function of the U.S. Department of Transportation is to administer federal regulations and manage federal funding for matters involving interstate transportation via land, sea and air. The Department of Transportation agencies responsible for executing these duties are the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), U.S. Coast Guard, Maritime Administration, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Railroad Administration, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and Federal Transit Administration.

The most common constituent questions in this category are centered around FAA related matters such as air traffic safety and private pilot's licenses, highway issues such as funding and right of way for federal projects, and regulations concerning Commercial Driver's License (CDL) requirements for commercial interstate transport drivers. However, transportation casework will vary according to the geographic and economic makeup of a congressional district. For example, a coastal district may handle a good volume of casework involving the Coast Guard and the Maritime Administration while a district located in the Midwest may never see a case involving these agencies.

Other constituent inquiries in this category will involve programs administered by the states. As with other state programs, it may be best to refer constituents to their state legislators. Common transportation topics under state jurisdiction involve road maintenance, drivers licenses, and vehicle registration.

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Completed Case Sheet.
2. A signed authorization from the constituent (for federal transportation cases).

CONTACTS

U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of Congressional Affairs
400 7th Street SW, Room 10408 B
Washington, DC 20590
Phone: 202/366-9714
Fax: 202/366-3675
website: www.dot.gov

UNEMPLOYMENT

State employment agencies administer federal unemployment insurance funds. Most casework in this category will deal with that program.

State government agencies are responsible for providing unemployment insurance benefits, helping unemployed individuals find work, offering training and job placement assistance for veterans, collecting state unemployment insurance tax, and providing certain labor market statistics within any given state. Constituents may seek your assistance in securing information or action on any of these topics.

Although the agencies handling this issue are under state jurisdiction, they are responsible for administering federal unemployment insurance funds. Usually, a congressional office's involvement is generally limited to checking on the status of a case or requesting information. The agency is not obligated to respond, but usually does as a matter of courtesy.

NOTE: Please refer to the "Displaced Workers" portion of the *Labor* section in this manual for questions regarding compensation and training for displaced workers seeking extended unemployment insurance, assistance based on layoffs associated with trade issues, or training assistance under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

INFORMATION TO GET

1. Constituent's name, address and phone number.
2. A detailed Case Sheet outlining what the constituent is requesting.
3. Social Security number.

CONTACTS

In most cases, it will be best to address your inquiry to the local or state employment agency.

WASHINGTON VISITORS

When your constituents visit our nation's Capital, you can arrange for them to tour various Washington attractions. Tickets to some are limited in availability.

Constituents who plan to visit Washington, D. C. can call the Congressman's office to request tours of the White House (certain groups only, for now), Bureau of Engraving, the U.S. Mint, Washington National Cathedral, the Library of Congress, the Kennedy Center, and Gallery Passes to the House and Senate Chambers. Scheduling for these tours is generally handled in the Congressman's Washington office.

The information below deals with congressional tours. These attractions also have public tours available, but the lines can be quite long. If the congressional tour is full and constituents still want to visit these places, check with the appropriate agency for current public tour information. Tour schedules change frequently, especially during the height of tourist season.

WHITE HOUSE TOURS

A tour of the White House has been the highlight of many tourists' visit to our nation's capitol. In the past, public tour tickets were available to Members of Congress, and those tickets were a great perk to provide to visitors from the district. Unfortunately, due to security concerns, public tours are not presently available. It is not known if or when they will resume.

A limited number of group tours are available for school groups, scouts, and other groups of 10 or more, but they can be very difficult to schedule. Have your Washington office check with the White House on availability. Also, the Congressman can personally take constituents to the White House for tours, but they must be scheduled well in advance.

BUREAU OF ENGRAVING AND PRINTING

Congressional tours are available and are given at 8:00 a.m., Monday through Friday. Public tours are given from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Availability is limited.

FBI

Because of security concerns, the FBI is not giving tours at present. They may resume at some time in the future.

WASHINGTON NATIONAL CATHEDRAL

Congressional tours are given on Mondays and Wednesdays at 9:15 a.m.

WASHINGTON VISITORS - CONT'D

KENNEDY CENTER

Congressional Tours are given Monday through Saturday at 9:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

U.S. CAPITOL

Many Members of Congress designate a staff member to conduct tours of the Capitol for visitors from the district. The Member or the staff member can give these tours any time the Capitol is open. Guided public tours are also available, but the congressional office has no role in arranging these.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Congressional tours are available on Tuesday and Friday at 8:30 a.m. and 2 p.m.

PROCEDURE

Complete the Washington Visitors Form in its entirety. If the trip is scheduled less than 30 days from the date you receive the call, fax or e-mail the form to the Washington office for the appropriate staff member to schedule the tours. Make a copy for the District file and send the original to Washington.

SECTION

11

SAMPLE

FORMS

CASEWORK FORMS

The following forms are contained in this section:

- **Authorization Form** (Consent for Release of Personal Records by Executive Agency)
- **Case Sheet** – For recording information about a case
- **Case Sheet/Another Person** – To use if the person giving the information is not the person experiencing the problem.
- **CIS Case Sheet** – For use with immigration cases
- **Flag Request Form** – To use when constituents request that a flag be flown over the U.S. Capitol.
- **Office Appointment Request Form** – Use when a constituent requests an appointment with the Congressman.
- **Passport Search Form** – Contains fields for information you will need if a constituent has requested a passport but has not yet received it.
- **Scheduling Sheet** – To get pertinent information about an event the Congressman is invited to attend.
- **Washington Visitors Form** – When a constituent plans a trip to Washington, this form will guide you through the relevant information you will need to assist in scheduling tours.

Consent for Release of Personal Records by Executive Agencies

Name of Agency: _____

To Whom It May Concern:

I have sought assistance from Congressman _____ on a matter that may require the release of information maintained by your agency, and which you may be prohibited from disseminating under the **Privacy Act of 1974**.

I hereby authorize you to release all relevant portions of my records or to discuss problems involved in this case with Congressman _____ or any authorized member of his staff until this matter is resolved.

Signature of Claimant

Date of birth

Mailing Address

City, State, Zip Code

Social Security #

VA Claim # (if applicable)

Telephone # for Claimant. If none, # where you could be reached

Date

Please return this form to:

Flag Request Form

Information Taken By: _____ Office: _____ Date Taken: _____

Request Received: By Telephone During Office Visit By Mail

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____ County: _____

Home Phone: (____) _____ Work Phone: (____) _____

Type of Flag: 3 x 5 Nylon \$ _____ 4 x 6 Nylon \$ _____ 5 x 8 Nylon \$ _____
 3 x 5 Cotton \$ _____ 4 1/3 x 5 1/2 Nyl. fringed \$ _____ 5 x 8 Cotton \$ _____

Amount Enclosed: _____ *Checks must be made payable to Rep. _____ Office Supply Account.*

Requested Special Date to be Flown Over Capitol: _____

To Be Flown For Presented To In Recognition Of
 In Memory Of In Commemoration Of

Name of Person, Group, or Event: _____

To Be Presented By (Name): _____

• Note: **Presented To** is the only term that that can be used on the certificate when the **Presented By** option is selected.

Address to mail flag (if different from above): _____

Deadline to Receive (Date): _____

Comments: _____

•Note: Mail this form to the D.C. office, along with the payment, on the date payment is received. (If flag(s) needed less than 30 days from date this form is filled out, transmit the information first, then mail form and payment to D.C. office.) **12/94**

Office Appointment Request

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

HOME PHONE: () _____ WORK PHONE: () _____

REASON FOR APPOINTMENT: _____

TAKEN BY: _____ OFFICE: _____

APPT. DATE & TIME: _____

Passport Search Form

Information Taken By: _____ Office Location: _____ Date Taken: _____

Applicant's Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

Phone# H:() W:() Other:()

Date of Birth: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Date of Application: _____

Date of Departure: _____

Application Completed At (Post Office or Clerk of Court location): _____

Mailed From: _____

Visa Needed? (yes or no): _____

New Application? (yes or no): _____

Renewal? (yes or no): _____

Old Passport #: _____ Date Passport Issued: _____

Comments: _____

Scheduling Sheet

EVENT: _____

DATE: _____

TIME: _____

LOCATION: _____

CONTACT NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

HOME PHONE:(_____) WORK PHONE:(_____)

OTHER INFORMATION: _____

TAKEN BY: _____ OFFICE: _____ DATE: _____

NOTE: This sheet should be sent to the D.C. office on the day the information is accepted by the staff member filing the request.

Washington Visitors Form

Submitted By: _____ Date Submitted: _____

Visitor Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Home Phone: () Work Phone: ()

Date Arriving in Washington: _____ Date Departing: _____

Times Visitor Will Be Available For Tours: _____

Number in Party: _____ Ages of Children in Party: _____

Tour(s) Requested:

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

White House

Supreme Court

House Gallery

Pentagon (Groups Only)

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

FBI

Kennedy Center

Senate Gallery

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Bureau of Engraving

National Cathedral

Library of Congress

Additional Information Requested: _____

Comments: _____

(D.C. Use Only)

Attempted: _____

Tours: _____

Confirm: _____

Transmit this form to D. C. office on date information is taken.

SECTION

12

**SAMPLE
LETTERS**

SAMPLE LETTERS INTRODUCTION

Following is an assortment of sample letters that show typical language used in casework. They are broken down into sections in the order you would use them.

When you begin work on a case, you will usually send initial letters to both the constituent and to the agency, similar to what you will find in Sections 100 and 200.

Many agencies send an interim letter acknowledging receipt of the inquiry, and you should send that to the constituent with a cover letter from Section 300. There is also a letter in that section to use if you have not heard from the agency for an extended period of time, typically 30 days.

Once the answer is received from the agency, send it on to the constituent with a letter from Section 400. See page 1–5 of this manual for more information on the step-by-step procedure.

Feel free to edit and tailor these letters to your individual style and to the details of the particular case. The letter to the constituent should not read like a form letter.

SAMPLE LETTERS INDEX

100 – INITIAL LETTER TO CONSTITUENT

- 100.....Request for Authorization
- 101Request for Authorization/Another Person
- 102.....State Matter – Letter to Constituent
- 103.....Acknowledgement – Request for Information
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200 – INQUIRY LETTER TO AGENCY

- 200.....Agency Inquiry – Letter Enclosed
- 201.....State Agency Inquiry
- 202.....Agency Inquiry – No Constituent Letter
- 203.....Agency Follow-up – No Response

300 – INTERIM REPLY

- 300.....Interim Reply – Received Letter from Agency
- 301.....Interim Reply – Information Received from Agency
- 302.....Interim Reply – Followed-up with Agency
- 303.....Interim Reply – No Response Yet
- 304.....Interim Reply – Update
- 305.....Follow-Up With Constituent – No Authorization Yet

400 – FINAL REPLY

- 400.....Final Reply
- 401.....Final Reply – Favorable
- 402.....Final Reply – Unfavorable
- 403.....Final Reply – Information Request
- 404.....Reply to Thank You – Favorable
- 405.....Reply to Thank You – Unfavorable
- 406.....Thank You – Compliment to Staff Member

100

REQUEST FOR AUTHORIZATION

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

Thank you for contacting my office about the problems you are experiencing with _____ .

To be of assistance to you, I first need you to sign the enclosed authorization form and return it to me at the address listed on the bottom of the form. This will allow _____ to release information about your case that will be helpful to me.

As soon as I receive this authorization form from you, I will follow up with the appropriate officials and try to resolve this matter as soon as possible.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx
enclosure

REQUEST FOR AUTHORIZATION / ANOTHER PERSON

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

Thank you for contacting me on behalf of _____. However, due to the provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974, all federal government agencies and departments are strictly prohibited from releasing information about anyone without that individual's written permission. This protection of the person's right to privacy means that I can do nothing to help until I have written authorization from _____.

I am enclosing a Privacy Act form that will give me the authorization I need to be of assistance in this matter. Please have _____ fill out, sign, and return the form to me at the earliest possible time. I will then contact the appropriate government officials about this case.

I appreciate your interest and concern in this matter.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

enclosure

STATE MATTER – LETTER TO CONSTITUENT

Date

Name

Address

City, State Zip

Dear Name:

Thank you for contacting my office about the problems you have encountered with _____.

As much as I would like to assist you with this matter, I am limited in what I can do because it comes under the direct authority of the State of _____ . Because I am a representative in the federal government, I have no jurisdiction in such state matters.

Hoping to be of some assistance, I have contacted the appropriate state officials on your behalf and explained the matter as you outlined it to me. I asked that your problem be given careful attention and that everything possible be done to help you.

I will be back in touch with you when I receive a response from the state officials. Meanwhile, please do not hesitate to let me know if there is anything else I can be doing for you.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

103

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT – REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

Thank you for contacting my office to request _____.

In an effort to be of assistance, I have contacted the appropriate agency to secure this (information) (material). I will be back in touch with you as soon as I receive it.

In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT – NEW CASE

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

Thank you for contacting me about the problem you are having with _____
_____.

I will be glad to assist you in every way that I can. I have contacted the appropriate officials at _____ to express my interest on your behalf, and I will be back in touch with you as soon as I receive a response.

In the meantime, please feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

200

AGENCY INQUIRY – LETTER ENCLOSED

Date

Name
Agency
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

Enclosed is a copy of correspondence I have received from my constituent, _____, concerning _____. I believe you you will find the letter self-explanatory.

I would appreciate it if you would review the enclosed letter and provide me with any information that may be helpful to my constituent. Please direct your response to my office at _____.

I am grateful for any assistance you may be able to provide in this matter.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx
enclosure

201
STATE AGENCY INQUIRY

Date

Name
Agency
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Name:

My constituent, _____, has contacted me about _____
_____.

I have explained that this matter is entirely within the jurisdiction of the State of _____, but that I would bring it to your attention for whatever action you feel is appropriate.

I would appreciate it if you would provide me with whatever information you feel may help address my constituent's concerns. Please address your response to my office at _____.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx

202
AGENCY INQUIRY – NO CONSTITUENT LETTER

Date

Name
Agency
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Name:

My constituent, _____, has contacted me about _____
_____.

I would appreciate it if you would provide me with whatever information you feel may help address my constituent's concerns. Please address your response to my office at _____.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx

203
AGENCY FOLLOW-UP – NO RESPONSE

Date

Name

Agency

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

It has been quite some time since I contacted you about _____. Since I have not yet received a reply, I wanted to take this opportunity to follow-up with you about the status of this matter. I have enclosed a copy of my original inquiry for reference purposes.

I would appreciate any information you may be able to offer that will help me respond to my constituent. Please address your reply to my office at _____.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

enclosure

300
INTERIM REPLY – RECEIVED LETTER FROM AGENCY

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

Knowing of my interest and concern, officials with _____
(agency) sent the enclosed correspondence to me to advise me of the most recent
developments in _____.

I certainly regret that this is taking so long, but I do hope their deliberations
prove beneficial to you. I will keep you advised of new developments. Please let
me hear from you if there is anything else that I should know about your case.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx

301
INTERIM REPLY—INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM AGENCY

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

Although I had hoped to know something definite about your case by now, I did receive the enclosed information today from _____.

I regret that there is nothing definite to report at this point, but I assure you that I will continue to pursue this matter until it is resolved.

Thank you for your patience.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

302
INTERIM REPLY – FOLLOWED-UP WITH AGENCY

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

Since I had heard nothing further in response to my inquiry on your behalf, today I again contacted _____ and expressed my interest in your situation.

I truly regret that it is taking so long to resolve this matter. I know how frustrating it must be for you. As soon as I receive a reply, I will let you know.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

303
INTERIM REPLY – NO RESPONSE YET

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

Although I have heard nothing further in response to my inquiry on your behalf regarding _____, I want to reassure you that I will continue to pursue this matter until it is resolved.

As soon as I have something definite to report, I will be back in touch with you. Meanwhile, please let me know if there is anything else I can do to assist you in this or any other matter involving the federal government.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

304
INTERIM REPLY – UPDATE

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

To bring you up-to-date on the progress I am making on your case, attached is information that I received from _____.

I expect to hear something definite soon and will notify you at that time. Meanwhile, please let me know if there is anything else I can do to assist you.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx
enclosure

305
FOLLOW-UP WITH CONSTITUENT – NO AUTHORIZATION YET

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

It has been some time since I sent you the authorization form I will need you to sign and return to me before I can place an inquiry regarding the problems you have encountered with _____ . I am writing today to see if anything further has developed since you last contacted me, or if you have decided not to pursue the matter for now.

I want to reassure you that if and when you would like me to proceed, I will be glad to do so. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

400
FINAL REPLY

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

In response to my inquiry on your behalf, I have received the enclosed letter from _____.

I believe you will find the reply to be self-explanatory. After you have had a chance to read the letter, please let me know if you have any questions or comments.

I appreciate the opportunity to be of service. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx

401
FINAL REPLY – FAVORABLE

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

In response to my inquiry on your behalf, I have received the enclosed letter from _____.

I want you to know how pleased I am that this matter was resolved in your favor.

I appreciate the opportunity to be of assistance, and I hope you will not hesitate to contact me in the future if I can be of service.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx
enclosure

402
FINAL REPLY – UNFAVORABLE

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

In response to my inquiry on your behalf, I have received the enclosed letter from _____.

I deeply regret that this matter could not be resolved in your favor. However, please keep me advised of any new developments, and let me know if there is additional information that might help resolve the case more favorably.

Thank you for contacting me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx
enclosure

403
FINAL REPLY – INFORMATION REQUEST

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

In response to my inquiry on your behalf, I have received the enclosed letter from _____.

I hope this reply satisfactorily responds to your concerns and provides the information you need. If you have questions or comments about the letter, please let me know.

I am happy to have assisted you in this matter.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

enclosure

404
REPLY TO THANK YOU – FAVORABLE

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

Your thoughtful letter reached my desk this morning. Your kind words mean more to me than you might imagine. I am delighted everything worked out in your favor.

It is a real honor to serve as your Congressman. I hope you will let me know if there is anything more I can do for you.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

405
REPLY TO THANK YOU – UNFAVORABLE

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

Your thoughtful letter reached my desk this morning, and I appreciate your kind words. I deeply regret that the matter could not be resolved in your favor.

It's a real honor to serve as your Congressman. I do hope you will let me know if I can assist you in the future.

Sincerely,

Name
Member of Congress

XX:xx

406

THANK YOU – COMPLIMENT TO STAFF MEMBER

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name:

I appreciate your thoughtful remarks about _____, a member of my Congressional staff. I am confident that my staff is an excellent team that is dedicated to serving our district. They work long hours, handle hundreds of inquiries a day, and provide the research capability I must have to be an informed legislator.

I am pleased that _____ was able to help you. Do not hesitate to call on us again.

Sincerely,

Name

Member of Congress

XX:xx

