



## President's Message

We are approaching a defining moment as a Chapter in the Illinois Council, and struggling. This situation is serious. On April 6, the Illinois Council Board, Chapter Presidents of the three active Chapters in Illinois, and I will meet to discuss setting the catchment boundaries for the four remaining Chapters under the Illinois Council. In the last 4 years, five of our nine Chapters have closed. Southwest currently has the most Chapter members of the four, and we are on the verge of tripling our responsible catchment area. I say this not to frighten you into retreating, but to make you aware that we hold the key to keeping the grass roots support for military and veteran issues and causes in our area. We can choose to make a stand just as 185 volunteers did at the Alamo, or we can turn our backs on our fellow soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, public health officers, and others, and let Congress have its way with our benefits and entitlements. Many of you have served and served and continue to serve. I thank you for your dedication and loyalty. There are others who may be able to serve with our Board, but

*Continued on page 3*

Treasurer's Report	
Checking Account Balance ...	\$818
Savings Account Balance .....	\$9,712
Certificates of Deposit .....	\$11,942
Total .....	\$22,472



Visit us on Facebook! (click logo on left)

Visit our website: [www.moaa-swil.org](http://www.moaa-swil.org)

Send your comments to [moaa.swil@gmail.com](mailto:moaa.swil@gmail.com)

## Take Action!

*(Note: for more details about issues you can carry to our legislators, see the Take Action article in Council and Chapter News, or go to:*

[takeaction.moaa.org/moaa/?0](http://takeaction.moaa.org/moaa/?0)

Check out the Take Action articles in Council and Chapter News, and at [moaa.org](http://moaa.org).

Hopefully by the time this newsletter is published, Congress will have passed the budget for FY2022 and sent it to the President for signature, and we'll be finished with Continuing Resolutions (CRs). March 31 marked the halfway point in the fiscal year, so if successful, the government would have only 6 months to execute any contract actions and expend funds. We'll have to wait and see how successful the spending of FY2022 dollars will be.

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## Program News

**DUE TO THE ONGOING SURGE OF  
COVID-19 CASES IN OUR AREA,  
WE ARE SUSPENDING OUR MEETINGS  
BETWEEN FEBRUARY AND APRIL 2022**

*Please join us for our Business Meeting*

*on 14 May, 11:00 am*

*At Fletcher's Kitchen & Tap in Belleville IL*

**We did not hold our Annual Christmas Auction this year. Please consider donating what you would've spent in the auction directly to the Chapter Scholarship Fund.**

### Upcoming Programs (all are tentative due to pandemic restrictions)

Date	Venue	Topic
21 Apr 2022	Global Brew Tap House	Chapter Happy Hour (4:30 to 6:30 pm)
14 May 2022	Fletcher's, Belleville	Chapter Business Meeting
18 Jun 2022	Picnic	Chapter 2021-22 Wrap Up
Sep 2022	Venue TBD	Chapter 2022-23 Kick Off

**If you normally receive the newsletter via email, but received it in the mail, then we don't have your correct email address. Send your name and correct email address to [moaa.swil@gmail.com](mailto:moaa.swil@gmail.com).**

### **A FEW GOOD MEN/WOMEN NEEDED.....**

It is time to think about election of officers for the Chapter. The elected positions are president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Board positions include but are not limited to programs, legislative issues, newsletter editor, surviving spouse liaison, USO/Fisher House drive, and scholarship.

Please consider volunteering for one of the above. If you are interested, or to nominate yourself or someone else, please contact any board member for more information, or email the newsletter editor at [moaa.swil@gmail.com](mailto:moaa.swil@gmail.com). We need new blood!

We'll be taking nominations for each position and voting at our Business Meeting this May.

## President's Message (continued)

may be afraid of overcommitting their time. If you don't want to be burdened by Congressional legislation affecting the military community, I implore you to become involved and help us make a stand for what has been promised, for those who have served, for those who are serving, and to preserve for the future the strong national defense that this nation has always been able to rely on. You won't regret it. Please help me out by letting me know that you want to get involved. Even just a little bit would help. Send me an e-mail. I promise I won't make you serve as President....at least not right away. God bless you, those who serve today in defense of freedom, and this great country.

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## Legislative News (continued)

Advocacy in Action is MOAA's annual one-on-one meetings with our Congressional representatives. This year's event will take place in April. Congress is in recess from April 11-22, so the time available to meet with the representatives will be short. As happened last year, the meetings will be virtual, and the team of Col (ret) Richard Smith and Col (ret) Bob Norman will meet with four Illinois representatives, including Mr Mike Bost of Illinois's 12th Congressional District, and Senator Dick Durbin. It is likely that Mr Bost will be the only member to take the meeting, while others will have a staff member attend the meeting. Three issues will be brought to the table:

- 1) The Major Richard Star Act (concurrent receipt for combat-injured servicemembers,
- 2) reduce TRICARE mental health copayments, and
- 3) enact a 4.6% military pay raise in the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

For more information about these issues and how you can support MOAA's efforts, visit [Spring Advocacy in Action Campaign at MOAA.org](#). Additionally, the April 2022 Military Officer Magazine will include tear-out letters highlighting the Major Richard Star Act, to fold, seal, and stamp, and mail to your US Senators and Representative on these issues. Let's flood their offices!!

MOAA has publicly announced their support of over 80 pieces of legislation in Congress for the remainder of this session. To see and read more about the legislation, go to [the MOAA Action Center](#).

Last year, the issue of toxic exposure reform was highlighted, and since that time, there has been some success in pushing up the legislation. Read more in the next article.

## Major Breakthroughs on Toxic Exposure Reform from VA, Congress, White House [\(Link\)](#) *(Updated March 3 with House passage of Honoring Our PACT Act)*

By: Kevin Lilley | Mar 2, 2022

The push to provide veterans exposed to toxins during service with the benefits they deserve took significant steps forward on all fronts to begin the month, from the halls of Congress to the State of the Union address to a major change in VA policy.

MOAA has worked with both the legislative and executive branches for years to secure comprehensive toxic exposure reform, looking to avoid the mistakes and major delays from previous generations and create a transparent, rapid process for determining and rewarding benefits to veterans. The issue took center stage March 1 as part of the president's State of the Union address.

"The VA is pioneering new ways of linking toxic exposures to diseases, already helping more veterans get benefits," President Joe Biden said. "And tonight, I'm announcing we're expanding eligibility to veterans suffering from nine respiratory cancers. I'm also calling on Congress: Pass a law to make sure veterans devastated by toxic exposures in Iraq and Afghanistan finally get the benefits and comprehensive health care they deserve."

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## Legislative News (continued)

On March 3, the House of Representatives moved on the president's request, passed the Honoring Our PACT Act (H.R. 3967) 256-174. The omnibus reform bill moves to the Senate, which has passed less-comprehensive legislation.

See the VA Changes and information about the PACT Act at this [link](#).

## Illinois Legislation

House Bill 5184, an amendment to the Military Veterans Assistance Act, seeks to clarify the county Veterans Assistance Commissions (VAC). The bill was submitted by Representative Stephanie Kifowit (D-84), chair, House Veterans Affairs Committee, and has been amended twice in the House. In checking the witness slips there were 55 slips submitted in opposition to the bill and only 9 in favor. In spite of the number opposing the legislation, on March 4, the bill was read for the third time in the House, and resulted in 104 yeas and none against. This with only 12 co-sponsors in the IL House. The bill passed to the IL Senate by Senator Charles Wilcox (R-32) and currently has 3 IL senators. Co-sponsoring including Sen Wilcox. The bill was referred to the Assignments Committee. No date has been established for a vote in the Senate as yet. However, when the Readings are scheduled to take place, Witness Slips supporting the legislation need to be submitted prior to the Reading and Debate.

As responsible Chapter members, two things need to happen:

- (1) download the witness slip instructions, and
- (2) post the witness slip in favor of Illinois HB5184.

Everyone in the Chapter should submit a witness slip in support of HB5184. There are currently 9 proponents and 55 opposed.

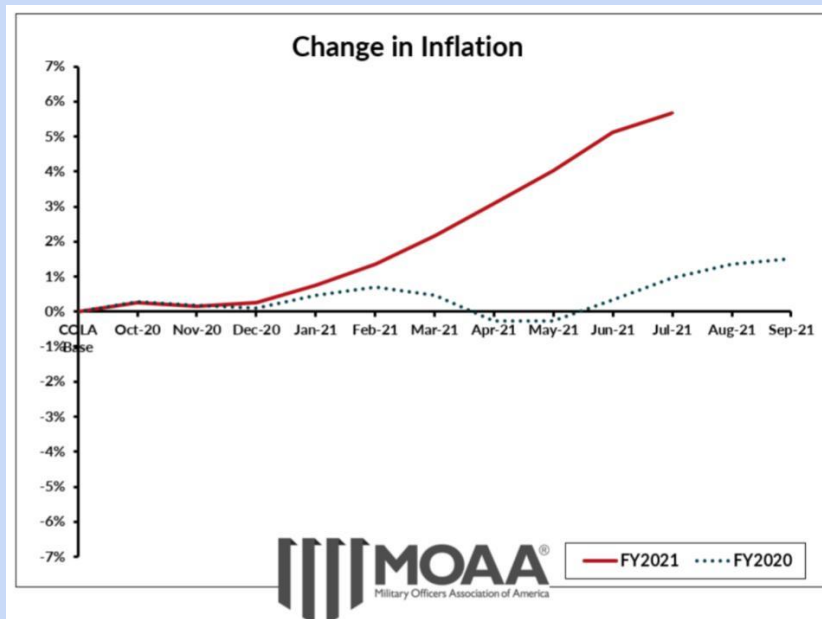
We need your support ASAP and before the next hearing which is yet to be scheduled. The Illinois General Assembly website for HB5184 is at this [link](#).

### COLA Watch

[moaa.org/content/take-action/cola-watch](https://moaa.org/content/take-action/cola-watch)

The February 2022 CPI is 278.943, 3.9 percent above the FY 2022 COLA baseline.

The Consumer Price Index for March 2022 is scheduled to be released April 12. The CPI baseline for FY 2022 is 268.421.



# YOUR MONEY

## Should You Contribute to a Flexible Spending Account? ([Link](#))

By: Lila Quintiliani | March 2, 2022

Your civilian employer may offer you a host of benefits previously unavailable to you as a member of the military. The onboarding process can be overwhelming and confusing, and it's not always immediately clear which benefits make sense for your needs.

There are two you may want to consider, however, especially if you pay for child care and have even moderate out-of-pocket health care expenses: the health flexible spending account (FSA) and the dependent care FSA.

### What Is an FSA?

Some employers offer a flexible spending account (also known as a flexible spending arrangement) funded by an employee's salary deferral that the employee can use to pay for certain out-of-pocket health care costs. Employers may also contribute to the account.

For 2022, the IRS limits health FSAs to \$2,850 per year per employer. If you are married, your spouse can put up to \$2,850 in an FSA with their employer as well. Note that employers may set lower limits for their workers. You can use FSA funds to pay for certain medical and dental expenses for you, your spouse, and your dependents. Read more at this [link](#).

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## SURVIVING SPOUSE CORNER

### Surviving Spouse Corner: Tips for Downsizing and Decluttering ([Link](#))

By: Renée Brunelle | Feb 25, 2022

Most people would agree they have experienced a move that did not go as planned. Missing items, broken items, and often a vague timeline for delivery from the moving company can make anyone have a few sleepless nights. Perhaps you have decades of "treasures" in your home you had planned on sharing with family. Then it is revealed all are not going to get passed down after all. Where do you start?

*Continued next page*

Chapter Officers	
President	Col (ret) Bob Norman
2nd VP/Comm	Maj (ret) Rick Sunner
Secretary	Lt Col (ret) Ann Morey
Treasurer	LTC (ret) Bob Koss Col (ret) Phil Yavorsky
Membership	Maj (ret) Sabrina Luttrell-Andrews
Programs	Yasemin Koss
ROTC Liaison	CDR (ret) Tim Grout
Spouses Liaison	Narni Cahill

**If you aren't a member of the SW IL MOAA Chapter,** visit our Membership Page:

[moaa-swil.org/pages/membership.html](https://moaa-swil.org/pages/membership.html)

To join MOAA: <https://www.moaa.org/why-join-moaa/>

**Call for Articles!** If you want to submit an article for the Eyes to the Skies, just send the draft article to [moaa.swil@gmail.com](mailto:moaa.swil@gmail.com). Please keep these things in mind:

- Submit your article by the 10th of the month prior
- The article must be in MS Word or text format

We reserve the right to edit the article so it fits in the newsletter and meets our (and MOAA's) editorial policy.

### Editorial Policy

The Southwest Illinois Chapter Newsletter is published monthly by the Southwest Illinois Chapter which is an affiliate of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). MOAA and its affiliated chapters and councils are nonpartisan.



## **Surviving Spouse Corner (continued)**

You must consider how long you have lived in the residence and how many people have lived there. As you add number of years and people, you also increase the number of weeks it will take to declutter.

I use the Marie Kondo “Magic of Tidying Up” approach to look at a client’s home with my business as a senior move manager. Start where there is the least emotional connection: clothing and accessories. Often, if you just declutter the clothes that don’t fit any longer and donate them, it can be a great way to start. Then tackle the books, papers, and general items (including bedroom, bathroom, office, and kitchen). End with mementos that hold the most sentimental triggers.

Luckily, help is available to begin this process and provide some professional guidance when needed. The National Association of Senior Move Managers has a website to find trusted professionals in a specific geographic area. They are experienced in helping someone sort their belongings and decide what is best to take, possibly sell, donate, or throw out. They can help with floorplan designs and mover scheduling if the final plan is to move. Depending on the business, they will charge by the hour or by the project.

Senior move managers often are a wealth of resources that can save you and your family time and/or money. They network with movers, senior placement specialists, senior living communities, Realtors, estate sale professionals, and many other businesses to be sure they can assist their clients when needed.

Family members often have good intentions to help with the decluttering and downsizing process. However, their own emotional attachment to items can complicate the downsizing process.

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# **COUNCIL AND CHAPTER NEWS**

## **TAKING CARE OF OUR OWN (Annual Chapter USO and Fisher House Donation Drive)**

By Ann Morey, Lt Col (ret), Feb 6, 2022

On this snowed-in-I-don’t-want-to-shovel-day, I am planning our annual drive to benefit USO and Fisher House. In the past 14-15 years, we have done ourselves proud. As in the past couple of years, we will contribute the monetary portion and the JROTC Units will handle the individual wrapped snacks, personal care items, and/or household items on the wish lists.

Our JROTC Units have been very supportive and I will be sending them an invite to partner with us again this year. In fact, O’Fallon Township High School JROTC unit has already contacted me.

St Michael’s Episcopal Church has been fantastic. The members there have accounted for a lot of our success and I will also be contacting them. But, don’t expect me to be able to write like Nick Wartonick or keep up with him and Sonya.

We are moving the drive to April this year because of some scheduling conflicts. Campaign dates will be 13 Mar-3 Apr 2022. I plan to pick up JROTC donations 6-8 Apr 22 then deliver them to USO and Fisher House week of 10 Apr 22.

So, how can you help?

1. Contribute to the campaign. Checks should be made out to USO Missouri or Fisher house in St Louis. You may contribute to both or just to the one of your choice. Please prepare separate checks.
2. If you are a member of a group, consider doing your own mini drive, either the snacks or money. If we each get just one other person to contribute, we will do great.
3. Depending on which JROTC units participate, I will need help with the pick-up dates. Usually, it takes 1-2 pickups to get the stuff back to my garage for sorting. May need some help with that too.

## Council and Chapter News (continued)

4. Will need pickups or vans to get it all delivered to the right spot. How many vehicles I will need depends on how much stuff is collected. In the past, usually takes at least 2 vehicles to transport to each site.

I am attaching the 'wish list' for both sites in case you need them for your 'mini' drive. Please note that we should not collect any fresh food or perishable items. The timing doesn't allow for refrigerated storage.

Thank you all for your time and generosity. I know for sure that both the USO and Fisher House greatly appreciate our assistance. The motto of MOAA is 'never stop serving'. One way we can do that is to support this campaign. We need to help take care of our own.

## WISH LISTS

*(Note: please visit the web sites for details about donations, including items they don't accept.)*

### FISHER HOUSE ([Link](#))

### St. Louis USO ([Link](#))

#### For the Guest Suites:

- Chap stick
- Hand sanitizer (small)
- Individual Kleenex
- For Our Guests
- Gas Gift Cards
- Grocery Store Gift Cards (Walmart, Sams Club, COSCO)
- Restaurant Gift Cards

#### For the Pantry:

- 13-gallon trash bags
- Bottled water
- Coffee cups w/lids
- Disposable containers
- Dryer sheets
- Hard candy (regular and sugar free)
- Kitchen disposable gloves
- Laundry detergent
- Paper plates
- Paper towels
- Plastic utensils forks/spoons
- Snacks (individual chips, fruit snacks, cakes)
- Ziploc bags

If you wish to personally deliver something, please make arrangements in advance by contacting the VA Fisher House at Jefferson Barracks by calling (314) 894-6145 or emailing [Vannieceia.Brown@va.gov](mailto:Vannieceia.Brown@va.gov)

Dairy/Deli Items
Hot Dog Buns
Sandwich Bread (White/Wheat)
Sliced Cheese (American/Swiss)
Vienna Sausages
Pre-packaged Lunch meat
Jalapeno Slices
Star-Kist Tuna Packets (individual)

Snacks
Slim Jim/ Beef Jerky
Chex Mix (individually packaged)
Potato Chips (individually packaged)
Cheese-itz (individually packaged)
Friday's Potato Skins (1oz)
Protein Bars
Maruchan Instant Lunch (cups)
Cookies (individually packaged)
Raisins (individually packaged)
Nuts (individually packaged)
Trail Mix (individually packaged)
Snack Cakes (individually packaged)
Muffins (individually packaged)
Dunkin Hines Mug Cakes
Chocolate Candy
Rice Krispie Treats (store bought)

Non-Food Items
6" Paper Plates
10" Paper Plates
Styrofoam Bowls (12 oz.)
Food Trays/Boats (2 lb.)
Indv. Wrapped Drinking Straws 7 3/4"
Styrofoam Cups (8 oz.)
Drinks
Folger's Medium Roast Coffee
Fruit/Vegetable Juice Boxes
Bottled water (12 oz or smaller)

Cleaning Supplies
Lysol Cleaning Wipes
Lysol Disinfecting Spray
Swiffer Wet Jet Refill
Swiffer Wet Jet Pads

Personal Care Items
Toothpaste (travel size)
Shaving Cream (travel size)
Mouthwash (travel size)
Razors
Lip Balm

Specialty Items
New, Unwrapped Toys

## How to Post a Witness Slip

By Richard Smith, Col (ret), USAF

MOAA Council Members,

I received an email from COL Michael Peck on the 2/19/2022, giving instructions on how to post a witness slip on the Illinois General Assembly website. In the email, COL Peck said,

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## Council and Chapter News (continued)

“We need support for House Bill 5184. This is the amendment to the military veterans assistance act which clarifies the county Veterans Assistance Commissions. The bill was submitted by Representative Stephanie Kifowit, chair, House Veterans Affairs Committee. In checking the witness slips I noticed there are slips submitted in opposition to the bill. Please have your organization submit witness slips in support of the bill. Thank you.”

As responsible council/chapter members, two things need to happen: (1) download the witness slip instructions, and (2) post the witness slip in favor of Illinois HB5184. Please have everyone in your chapter submit a witness slip in support of HB5184. There are currently 9 proponents and 55 opposed. We need your support ASAP and before the next hearing which is yet to be scheduled. The Illinois General Assembly website for HB5184 is at this [link](#).

Thank you for your support.

Richard  
Director  
IL CoC

of

Smith  
Legislation

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## News from National MOAA

For more information about the articles in this month’s newsletter and how you can get more involved in other issues, visit the MOAA [Take Action Center](#) or [News](#) webpages. Also, here are some of the active Legislative Campaigns MOAA is engaged in:

- **Help Military Families Today** ([Link](#)), ACT NOW to urge your senator to help military families by securing financial relief for the U.S. child care industry.
- **Shutdown Update: USPHS, Coast Guard, NOAA Remain in Flux** ([Link](#)), MOAA has advocated for full funding of the government to allow the Coast Guard, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps, and U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps to complete their mission and to allow their members to avoid financial hardship.
- **Ask Your Senator to Back Bill That Improves Survivor Benefits** ([Link](#)), Tester’s bill, the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Improvement Act, would increase the amount of DIC paid to surviving spouses and align the benefit with other federal programs. The proposal, which could net survivors an extra \$5,400 a year, has been a long-time goal of both MOAA and The Military Coalition.
- **Advocacy in a Virtual Environment: How to Make Your Voice Heard** ([Link](#)), MOAA’s Government Relations team regularly meets with lawmakers and their staffs in remote settings to ensure that servicemembers past and present, their families, caregivers, and survivors remain a priority for the 117th Congress. There are many ways MOAA members can support these efforts by advocating from your home.:
  - **Call:** One of the easiest ways to engage with your lawmakers is to call, using MOAA’s direct line to the Congressional switchboard at (866) 272-6622, and ask the Capitol operator to connect you with your legislator’s office.
  - **Send a Letter:** Typically, a member of Congress prefers letters on legislative issues be sent to their Washington, D.C., office. Click these [House](#) and [Senate](#) links to find your elected officials' D.C. addresses.
- **Ask Your Lawmaker to Preserve the Prestige of Our National Cemetery** ([Link](#)), A recent Congressional Research Service (CRS) publication may add to the confusion some lawmakers face regarding the future of Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) – yet another reason to make your voice heard at this critical stage.



## News from National MOAA (cont) ([Link](#))

- **Military Treatment Facilities Adding QR Codes to Prescription Packaging** ([Link](#)), Throughout 2022, military treatment facility (MTF) pharmacies will be replacing printed monographs or MedGuides (the paper medication guides that come with many prescription drugs) with QR codes on prescription packaging. Patients can request a paper copy if they prefer the printed version.
- **17 Medical Centers Would Close Under Proposed VA Realignment** ([Link](#)), The Department of Veterans Affairs has unveiled a plan that calls for closing 17 aging or underused medical centers, while shifting services to more than 30 new or rebuilt hospitals. In some cases, it would rely on private care.
- **What Does the VA Facility Realignment Plan Mean for Veterans' Health Care?** ([Link](#)), The VA released a report March 14 outlining its plans to strengthen and modernize medical infrastructure to meet the changing needs of the veteran population.

## SW IL VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE

The [VSO](#) provides free assistance to veterans, their dependents, and survivors in navigating complex services and benefits. The nearest VSO is in Belleville, and can be contacted at 618-233-8445/5140.

Visit the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs by following this [link](#). Here are some of those articles:

- On the [Advocacy](#) page...
  - [Compensation](#), many programs exist to compensate veterans and families for their service.
  - [State Licenses and Military Training](#), the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and numerous Illinois state agencies are actively taking steps to develop policies and procedures through which military experience can be applied toward professional licensing standards.
  - [Service Animals](#), Service Animals are instrumental in supporting veterans through transition back to civilian life and the challenges of post-traumatic stress disorder.
- [Statewide Veteran Organizations](#), Illinois offers a wide-range of veterans' organizations that provide resources, programs, and support.
- [Education](#), As a veteran, there are education programs available which you and your family may use for a wide variety of approved education and training programs including apprenticeship and on-the-job training, college degree and certificate programs, flight training, and correspondence courses. Each program provides different benefits to different groups of individuals and offers a specified number of "months" of benefits.

For information on services available to the aging population, please visit the [Illinois Department on Aging](#).

Use the links below to read some timely veteran-related articles.

- [Operation HerStory](#) -- Gwen M. Diehl. Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs Veteran Home Coordinator joined the Operation HerStory all-female honor flight on October 6th.
- [Free Legal Aid for IL Veterans](#) -- Active Duty Servicemembers, Veterans, Guard, Reserve, and spouses/dependents can receive free legal aid through the IL Armed Forces Legal Aid Network.
- [Send a Vet a Message](#) -- Send a message of support to Illinois Veterans' Homes residents or staff.
- [Illinois Veterans Newsletters](#) -- Award-winning email newsletter created by IDVA, delivers important news and information to the Illinois veteran community. (March 2020 edition at this [link](#).)
- [Operation Rising Spirit](#) -- Challenges service organizations, volunteers, and patriots of Illinois to raise the spirits of military veterans and the heroic staff who care for them at state veterans' homes.
- [Veterans Drivers License](#) -- Veteran's designation helps ensure military veterans receive the services and benefits for which they are entitled.

Southwest Illinois Chapter  
Military Officers Association of America  
P.O. Box 735  
O'Fallon IL 62269

## Meeting Announcement

**DUE TO ONGOING COVID-19 SURGES IN THE AREA, WE ARE NOT  
HOLDING A MEETING THIS MONTH.**

**SEE PROGRAM INFORMATION ON PAGE 2 FOR DETAILS.**