

COA MEMBERSHIP TALKING POINTS

I hope you agree that the public health work Commissioned Officers do within their agencies throughout the nation and around the globe is valuable. I also imagine you would agree that Commissioned Corps officers should enjoy the same level of support, recognition, and public understanding that our sister uniformed services do for the service they provide to the American people.

If you do agree, we also hope you understand how important it is that you become or continue to be a member of the Commissioned Officers Association (COA). COA is the only entity whose sole focus is to safeguard the welfare and future of the Commissioned Corps. Without the support and advocacy of COA year after year, our existence, and therefore our ability to do our jobs in uniform, is threatened.

Officers need a sound advocate at a time when the Corps is radically changing the way it manages you as an officer, the way you are promoted, and the path your career will take.

- *Did you know* that ability of PHS officers to transfer Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits to their dependents would have never happened had COA not painstakingly tracked the legislation, advocated for Corps inclusion and followed up to ensure that HHS made this benefit available to officers?
- *What about our status as a uniformed service?* COA was instrumental in fighting back against the DHHS determination that Corps officers could be furloughed during a government shutdown.
- *Did you know that PHS officers have better workforce protections thanks to COA?* COA fought to get PHS officers included under the Military Whistleblower Protection Act. COA continues to advocate for additional workforce protections, ensuring that we maintain parity with our sister services.
- *What about pay and benefits?* COA has, time and time again, ensured that pay, leave, medical, and retirement benefits remain tied to our sister services. Most recently, COA worked closely with Capitol Hill to ensure expanded TRICARE coverage for dependents with autism was made available to PHS officers (both active duty and retired).
- *How is COA working on the future of the Corps?* The Affordable Care Act authorized the creation of a Public Health Sciences Track, which would provide scholarships for at least 850 health program students per year in a variety of disciplines, with graduates paying back their education with two years in the PHS CC for every year of education funded. Though funding has not yet been appropriated, COA is working tirelessly with Congress and Department leadership to see this program implemented.

These are only a few of the many issues the COA is working behind the scenes to vigorously advocate on our behalf so that we can concentrate on what we do best—delivering the best public health to our nation and throughout the globe.

Currently about 1 in 3 officers are not members of COA! *Are you one of them?* Without full backing of the Corps, COA's ability to advocate on our behalf at the highest levels is significantly weakened.

Signing up to be a member of COA couldn't be easier or cheaper. You can sign up online at <http://www.coausphs.org/wwjoincoa.cfm>. You can pay by annual bill, have automatic deduction

come right from your payroll, or become a lifetime member. The cost is between 25 and 38 cents per day depending on your rank.

There are also several perks and benefits to membership of COA. Below are just a few:

- Membership supports officership, which is critical towards promotion. Local and national activities give you the opportunity to give back to your community and to the Corps, while supporting your career.
- COA provides advocacy for individual officers (For example, when an officer was denied a DoD base privilege, COA Executive Director Jerry Farrell sent the DoD director some language from a statute with the "uniformed service" clause in it. The officer was then granted the privilege.)
- COA works with sister organization COF in providing training, scholarship, and fellowship opportunities for PHS officers and their families. COA members enjoy a significant discount on registration fees. COF also has scholarship opportunities for junior officers, children and spouses of COA members. And the COF Symposium provides a critical opportunity for officers to network, connect with fellow officers, find new job opportunities and build *esprit-de-corps*.
- COA offers members low-cost insurance programs such as Group Term Life, Long-Term Disability and In-Hospital Cash Plan that can be continued AFTER leaving the PHS.
- COA's award-winning newsletter, *Frontline*, provides timely reports on activities and items of interests to members and provides a venue for officers to publish their stories. *Frontline* is also a great place to write about the accomplishments of your group, unit, or community service activity.
- COA members receive a free online subscription to *Public Health Reports*, the peer-reviewed journal of the Public Health Service, published since 1878.

We need your help to enhance public understanding of the Corps and we have great activities planned to do this through COA, but our officers must be members of COA to participate.

If you are not a member of COA, I hope you understand the value of your membership to our future as a uniformed service. If you are a member, but have not yet encouraged a fellow officer or two to become a member of COA, this is one small but important step you can take to support the Corps.