



# American Legion Auxiliary

*In the Spirit of Service Not Self for Veterans, God and Country*

## **“Wives” to Become “Spouses” – a Look at What this Means for the American Legion Auxiliary and Our Mission**

Think of all the ways The American Legion Family can serve future veterans, servicemembers, and their families with an increase in membership eligibility.

The American Legion Auxiliary wants the century-old promise of *Service Not Self* to continue well into the future. An increasing number of veterans, servicemembers, and their families will need support. The American Legion Family is taking a “big picture” look at how to help these future families and keep our membership strong.

At The American Legion’s Spring 2019 National Executive Committee Meeting, Legionnaires voted to recommend replacing the word “wife” with “spouse” in its constitution and bylaws section regarding the American Legion Auxiliary’s membership eligibility.

Since the announcement of this change, ALA National Headquarters has received comments, questions, and concerns from our members both for and against the change. We want to address some of the common questions that have been asked.

**Q:** Why change ALA membership eligibility?

**A:** Since 1919, the American Legion Auxiliary has been committed to meeting the needs of veterans, servicemembers, and their families. In order to continue the ALA’s promise of *Service Not Self* into the future, we need to explore options to keep our membership strong. Embracing people, and opening our membership recruitment pool, allows the American Legion Auxiliary to become even more wide-reaching to those we serve – our heroes.

When The American Legion created the ALA in 1919, a small amount of women served in the military, and women were not allowed to serve in combat units. Currently, 1.9 million women veterans are living the United States, and 9 percent of the U.S. military is female. By 2045, it’s estimated that 18 percent of the U.S. military will be comprised of women.

This change in eligibility has much promise for growth – leading to new resources, increased funding opportunities, and additional diversity and talent among American Legion Auxiliary leadership, as well as general membership.

**Q:** How can this change help ALA membership?

**A:** As we look to the future, there will be an increasing number of spouses who would not be eligible for membership, according to current eligibility rules. Under this new resolution, those spouses can be assets to our organization. In turn, the ALA can give support to those spouses. Think about female spouses who are alone as their husband is deployed. They have the ALA to

lean on. Who can the male spouse rely on? Changing the makeup of our organization can help us better serve an underserved population. Every organization needs diverse skillsets to accomplish goals.

**Q:** Would this change need to be approved by Congress?

**A:** The American Legion Auxiliary is not chartered by Congress. The American Legion, a veterans service organization, is chartered by Congress. The American Legion Auxiliary was created by The American Legion and is not mentioned in The American Legion's Congressional charter. The Legion approved the ALA to operate as a separate corporation; however, The American Legion has always set the eligibility requirements of the ALA in their bylaws. The American Legion's National Executive Committee voted on this recommendation during its 2019 Spring Meeting for adoption by American Legion convention delegates.

**Q:** What about the previous communications issued by former ALA leadership claiming this change could not happen? Why is that information inaccurate?

**A:** Previously released messaging could have been interpreted by members to mean the ALA needs Congressional approval for this change to happen. That information is inaccurate. The American Legion Auxiliary is not chartered by Congress.

**Q:** Will the American Legion Auxiliary vote on this change?

**A:** This change in American Legion Auxiliary membership eligibility will be voted on by The American Legion delegates at The American Legion's National Convention in Indianapolis, Aug. 23-23, 2019. American Legion Auxiliary convention delegates will be adopting necessary changes to our Constitution and Bylaws because of the eligibility change.

**Q:** What are the consequences if the ALA decides not to adopt this eligibility change?

**A:** The American Legion, in the most extreme situation, can disallow us to use our trademark, name, and emblem. The American Legion can dissolve the ALA and create a different auxiliary organization to support veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

**Q:** Did the American Legion Auxiliary form its own Congressional charter a few years ago?

**A:** No, the ALA does not have a Congressional charter. The American Legion Auxiliary continues to follow The American Legion's bylaws that determine our eligibility.

**Q:** We are the world's largest women's patriotic service organization. Also, we were formed as a women's auxiliary. So, how can we allow men to join?

**A:** When this resolution is adopted by The American Legion convention body, we no longer will call ourselves the world's largest women's patriotic service organization.

Decades ago – not long after the ALA's founding – the word "women's" was omitted from the ALA's name. At our first National Convention in 1921, we became known as the American Legion Auxiliary. Today, some ALA units incorrectly refer to themselves as "the Women's Auxiliary" or "the Ladies' Auxiliary." Our official name is American Legion Auxiliary.

As our culture changes, we need to look at how the organization needs to change. If you think about The American Legion membership, it was originally males, but now there are female

Legionnaires, and we even had the first female national commander in 2017-2018. As we enter our 100th year, we need to look at how to serve future veterans and their families. Embracing people, and the opening of our membership in the ALA, has much promise for growth, leading to new resources, increased funding opportunities, and additional diversity and talent among our leadership, as well as general membership.

**Q:** If The American Legion has to get approval from Congress to change its eligibility, how are they able to change the ALA's eligibility without Congress?

**A:** With the LEGION Act (S. 504) in the news recently, there may be some confusion on how eligibility is determined. Because The American Legion is chartered by Congress, they need to have Congressional approval. The American Legion Auxiliary is not mentioned in the Legion's Congressional charter and does not have its own Congressional charter. The LEGION Act, which has passed in the Senate, expands membership to honorably discharged veterans who have served during periods since World War II not currently recognized as times of war. If the LEGION Act is passed, this eligibility change will also change the membership eligibility of the American Legion Auxiliary and allow us to serve more veterans and their families.

**Q:** How would this change affect the American Legion Auxiliary membership application or signing up new members?

**A:** We anticipate to start taking applications on September 1, 2019, from spouses, based on the outcome of The American Legion bylaw change at their National Convention. When The American Legion adopts this change, the American Legion Auxiliary will make changes to our bylaws to reflect the change.

**Q:** Does the definition of "spouse" include domestic partners?

**A:** This depends on state law. The definition of "spouse" is what is recognized in your state.

**Q:** Would this resolution change any other wording in The American Legion's constitution and bylaws?

**A:** Yes. Gender-specific language in The American Legion's constitution and bylaws will be modified. Below are The American Legion's proposed changes in their Constitution and Bylaws.

### ***The American Legion Constitution and Bylaws proposed changes:***

#### ARTICLE XIII

#### AUXILIARIES

Section 1. ~~THE AMERICAN LEGION~~ The American Legion recognizes an auxiliary organization, known as ~~the~~ The American Legion Auxiliary.

Section 2. ~~Membership in the American Legion Auxiliary shall be limited to the grandmothers, mothers, sisters, wives, and direct and adopted female descendants of members of THE AMERICAN LEGION, and to the grandmothers, mothers, sisters, wives, and direct and adopted female descendants of all men and women who were in the Armed Forces of the United States during any of the following periods: April 6, 1917, to November 11, 1918; December 7, 1941, to December 31, 1946; June 25, 1950, to January 31, 1955; February~~

*28, 1961, to May 7, 1975; August 24, 1982, to July 31, 1984; December 20, 1989, to January 31, 1990; August 2, 1990, to the date of cessation of hostilities as determined by the Government of the United States; all dates inclusive, or who, being citizens of the United States at the time of their entry therein, served on active duty in the Armed Forces of any of the governments associated with the United States during any of said periods, and died in the line of duty or after honorable discharge; and to those women who of their own right are eligible for membership in THE AMERICAN LEGION.*

Membership in ~~the~~ The American Legion Auxiliary shall be limited to the grandmothers, mothers, sisters, ~~wives~~ spouses, and direct and adopted female descendants of members of The American Legion, and to the grandmothers, mothers, sisters, ~~wives~~-spouses, and direct and adopted female descendants of all men and women who were in the Armed Forces of the United States during any of the following periods: April 6, 1917, to November 11, 1918; December 7, 1941, to December 31, 1946; June 25, 1950, to January 31, 1955; February 28, 1961, to May 7, 1975; August 24, 1982, to July 31, 1984; December 20, 1989, to January 31, 1990; August 2, 1990, to the date of cessation of hostilities as determined by the Government of the United States; all dates inclusive, or who, being citizens of the United States at the time of their entry therein, served on active duty in the Armed Forces of any of the governments associated with the United States during any of said periods, and died in the line of duty or after honorable discharge; and to those women who of their own right are eligible for membership in The American Legion.

Section 3. The American Legion Auxiliary shall be governed in each Department of ~~THE AMERICAN LEGION~~ The American Legion by such rules and regulations as may be prescribed by the National Executive Committee and thereafter approved by such Department of ~~THE AMERICAN LEGION~~ The American Legion.

We thank all of you for your service to the American Legion Auxiliary's mission. We know you have a passion for our mission and want to see it succeed. ALA members join for many different reasons, but most of them stay for the mission: serving those who have given us our freedom.