

URGENT ACTION NEEDED: VIRGINIA MAY ELIMINATE BARIATRIC COVERAGE FOR STATE EMPLOYEES.

The Obesity Action Coalition is calling on all Virginia state employees who have had or are considering bariatric surgery to contact House and Senate Conferees working on the Budget compromise.

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This guide was created by the Obesity Action Coalition in an effort to encourage state employees to help save Virginia's bariatric surgery benefit.

Virginia State Employees and Bariatric Surgery

Governor Kaine has proposed eliminating coverage of gastric bypass for all state employees beginning July 1, 2009 as part of his budget reduction efforts. The House version of the Virginia Budget recently passed contains slightly different language that would eliminate coverage of surgery for morbid obesity beginning July 1, 2009 for all state employees. However, as the proposals language differ, the ultimate decision on whether or not the benefit is cut is now in the hands of a Conference Committee who has been tasked with working out the differences. The OAC believes that the elimination of bariatric surgery negatively impacts the quality of health and life of the employees of Virginia by denying them access to needed medical care. Morbid obesity is a complex disease that requires treatment. The medical treatment of morbid obesity decreases mortality, improves or resolves obesity-related illnesses and improves quality of life. Denying patients and their physicians proven options for treatment is an ill-advised, short-term economic decision that endangers the long-term health of many state employees.

Call to Action

The OAC urgently requests that all state employees who have had bariatric surgery and those considering bariatric surgery educate the Budget Conferees via phone or email about the importance of maintaining the state employee bariatric surgery benefit. This issue is very important. Everyday, we read about the impact obesity has on our society, and now it is time for those affected by obesity to come together and demand continued access. **The Budget Conferees will likely make their decisions by Wednesday, February 25 so it is essential that you reach out to those officials immediately.**

Who Should I Call or E-mail?

The OAC has targeted the following Virginia officials and legislators.

HOUSE BUDGET CONFEREES:

Delegate Lacey E. Putney (Bedford): (804) 698-1019, DelLPutney@house.state.va.us

Delegate Phillip A. Hamilton (Newport News): (804) 698-1093, DelPHamilton@house.state.va.us

Delegate M. Kirkland "Kirk" Cox (Colonial Heights): (804) 698-1066, DelKCox@house.state.va.us

Delegate Johnny S. Joannou (Portsmouth): (804) 698-1079

Delegate Beverly J. Sherwood (Frederick): (804) 698-1029, DelBSherwood@house.state.va.us

Delegate Clarke N. Hogan (Halifax): (804) 698-1060, DelCHogan@house.state.va.us

SENATE BUDGET CONFEREES:

Senator Charles J. Colgan (Prince William): (804) 698-7529, district29@sov.state.va.us

Senator R. Edward Houck (Spotsylvania): (804) 698-7517, district17@sov.state.va.us

Senator Janet D. Howell (Fairfax): (804) 698-7532, district32@sov.state.va.us

Senator William C. Wampler Jr. (Bristol): (804) 698-7540, district40@sov.state.va.us

Senator Walter A. Stosch (Henrico): (804) 698-7512, district12@sov.state.va.us

Senator Kenneth W. Stolle (Virginia Beach): (804) 698-7508, district08@sov.state.va.us

Looking for Tips on What to Say or E-mail?

Below, please find some suggested topics, facts, do's, don'ts and a sample e-mail.

- If you are a post-bariatric surgery patient, please share in your call or e-mail the difference your weight-loss has made in your life from both a quality of life and health standpoint. For instance, if you are no longer a diabetic, you now take a reduced number of medications and/or no longer suffer from sleep apnea. Your personal story is powerful.
- Make sure you emphasize that you are a state employee and include any differences in your work performance, absenteeism, health costs, etc. post-surgery.
- If you are seeking weight-loss surgery, explain your personal preparation, what health complications you are currently experiencing, how they affect your quality of life and the burden that would be placed on you by the exclusion of weight-loss surgery.

Facts about Bariatric (Weight-Loss) Surgery

- Extends the lives of patients.
- Decreases the incidence and costs of obesity-related diseases, such as diabetes (completely resolved in 76.8 percent of patients), hypertension (resolved in 61.7 percent of patients) and sleep apnea (resolved in 85.7 percent of patients).
- Demonstrates a return of investment in as little as 2 years.
- Improves the quality of life of the recipients.
- Medicare recently reviewed coverage and after extensive review, expanded access to bariatric surgery.
- For more facts, see the OAC publication, ***"Fact Sheet: Why it makes sense to provide treatment for obesity through bariatric surgery."***

Do's

- Be brief and to the point. Short calls and e-mails (one-page) are the most effective.
- Mention the specific issue: elimination of the bariatric surgery benefit for state employees.
- Give your reasons for opposing the elimination.
- Be courteous and reasonable.
- Be sure to address the individual by the correct title.
- If e-mailing, include all of your contact information.
- If calling and leaving a message, include your name and return number.
- Double check your information for accuracy.
- Use correct grammar and complete sentences.
- If e-mailing, remember to use a spell check feature.
- Include your personal story.
- Write a follow-up letter thanking the individual.

Don'ts

- Try not to be longwinded.
- Avoid a righteous tone.
- Avoid abbreviations.
- Refrain from apologizing for writing or taking valuable time.
- Do not threaten anyone.
- Do not demand anything from the individual.

- Avoid form letters.
- Do not refer or allude to politics as sleazy or dishonorable.

Sample E-mail

Below, please find a sample e-mail that will help you get started:

Dear Title (Governor, Senator, Representative, Commissioner, etc.),

In your first paragraph, mention the following points:

1. You are writing to request their assistance in maintaining access to bariatric (weight-loss) surgery for state employees that is currently threatened by both the Senate and House version of the Budget.
2. Discuss how this specific issue affects you and your family.

In your second and third paragraphs, mention the following items:

1. Share some of the benefits of bariatric surgery that you have experienced or wish to experience.
2. Share your personal connection with the issue in question. (Remember to remain brief. A short letter can accomplish just as much as a long one.)

In your last paragraph, discuss the following closing items:

1. Urge them to help restore the bariatric surgery benefit.
2. Request that the individual write you back, informing you on their position regarding the issue.
3. Thank the individual.

Sincerely,
Your Full Name