

Veterans Funeral and Burial Legislation Supported by the National Funeral Directors Association

The Issue: Veterans Earned These Benefits

Every veteran who served our nation earned the right to a dignified funeral and burial. But navigating federal benefits at the time of death can be complex and overwhelming for families. Funeral directors work every day to ensure:

- Veterans receive the honors they earned
- Families receive the benefits they are entitled to
- Military service is recognized with dignity and respect

We support legislation that strengthens, expands and improves funeral and burial benefits for America's veterans.

The Role of Funeral Directors

Funeral directors serve as the essential link between grieving families and federal agencies, including:

- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- The Department of Defense (DoD)
- National and state veterans cemeteries
- Veterans service organizations

While the VA and DoD administer benefits, funeral directors guide families through the entire process, both administratively and emotionally. Funeral directors:

- Coordinate military honors
- Assist families in filing VA benefit claims
- Ensure proper grave markers and memorial items are provided
- Manage logistics for burial in national cemeteries
- Guide families through complex eligibility and documentation requirements

Why Legislative Action Matters

Even small administrative gaps can create significant burdens for grieving families. Veterans legislation supported by NFDA focuses on:

- Expanding burial eligibility and memorial benefits
- Ensuring spouses and dependents are properly recognized
- Providing flexibility for interment decisions
- Strengthening the Office of Survivors Assistance
- Improving coordination between federal agencies
- Enhancing access to national and state veterans cemeteries
- Reducing delays in benefits and honors
- Protecting the dignity of veterans and their families

These improvements are not abstract policy changes; they directly affect families in every Congressional district.

Real-World Impact

When funeral and burial benefits function smoothly:

- Military honors are rendered without delay
- Headstones and markers are installed properly
- Families understand the benefits available to them
- Veterans are laid to rest with dignity

At a time of loss, families should not have to navigate bureaucratic barriers. When systems fail or lag:

- Families experience unnecessary stress
- Burial timelines are disrupted
- Benefits go unused
- Administrative confusion compounds grief

This Is About Dignity and Promise

Funeral directors see firsthand the pride families feel when:

- A flag is presented
- *Taps* is played
- Military honors are rendered
- A veteran is laid to rest among fellow service members

These moments matter deeply. Congressional action to strengthen veterans' funeral and burial benefits ensures that the promise made to service members is fully honored.

What We Support

We currently support numerous bipartisan veterans bills advancing these goals including:

- **Ensuring Veterans' Final Resting Place Act (H.R. 647):** This bill ensures the provision of an urn or commemorative plaque does not prohibit an individual from receiving a headstone or marker or other burial benefits (e.g., interment at a national cemetery) from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Under current law, individuals who request an urn or plaque do so in lieu of being furnished with a headstone or burial benefit.
- **Legislation to Increase Service-Connected Burial Benefits (S. 4108):** In 2020, Congress passed legislation to increase burial benefits for non-service-connected deaths, linking them to inflation. This resulted in the benefit amount for deaths unrelated to service being higher than that for service-connected deaths, which remains capped at \$2,000. This legislation would increase the benefit to \$3,000 and ensure it keeps pace with inflation, helping families cover funeral and burial costs while honoring veterans whose deaths are connected to their service.
- **Veteran Burial Timeliness and Death Certificate Accountability Act (H.R. 4398 / S. 2309):** When a veteran passes, a signed death certificate is required for burial and to access benefits. However, under current VA practices, it can take four to eight weeks for a death certificate to be signed. Without a signed death certificate, the veteran's body must be kept above ground, in some cases for weeks at a time, while their family is locked out of checking accounts, savings accounts and other information that is crucial for the funeral process. This legislation requires that the VA must certify a veteran's death within 48 hours of notification.
- **Dennis and Lois Krisfalusy Act (H.R. 1344 / S.1127):** This bill expands eligibility for a memorial headstone or marker for the spouse, surviving spouse, child, or dependent of a veteran or member of the Armed Forces. This bill removes that date requirement, allowing eligible individuals to receive a memorial headstone or marker regardless of when they died.
- **Prioritizing Veterans' Survivors Act (H.R. 1228):** This bill provides that the Office of Survivors Assistance (OSA) must operate within the Office of the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Currently, OSA operates within the Pension and Fiduciary Service of the Veterans Benefits Administration. *Passed the House awaiting Senate action.*

The Ask

We respectfully urge you to:

- ✓ Support legislation that strengthens veterans' funeral and burial benefits
- ✓ Prioritize measures that improve survivor assistance and burial access
- ✓ Ensure every eligible veteran receives the honors they have earned

When a veteran dies, the nation has one final opportunity to keep its promise. Funeral directors stand ready to help. We ask Congress to also stand with veterans and their families.

Sponsors

- Ensuring Veterans' Final Resting Place Act (H.R. 647): Sen. Jim Banks (R-IN); Rep. Rudy Yakym (R-IN)
- Legislation to Increase Service-Connected Burial Benefits (S. 4108): Sen. James Risch (R-ID); Sen. Angus King (I-ME)
- Veteran Burial Timeliness and Death Certificate Accountability Act (H.R. 4398 / S. 2309): Rep. Tom Emmer; Sen. John Boozman (R-AR)
- Dennis and Lois Krisfalusy Act (H.R. 1344 / S.1127): Sen. John Fetterman (D-PA); Rep. Guy Reschenthaler (R-PA)

Committee Jurisdiction

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee; House Veterans' Affairs Committee

For More Information, Contact: Lesley Witter, National Funeral Directors Association, LWitter@NFDA.org or 202-236-4926.