

House Committee on Armed Services
Full Committee Hearing: Member Day
April 11, 2024
Statement for the Record – Rep. Dean Phillips (MN-03)

Thank you, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the House Committee on Armed Services, for the opportunity to provide a statement for the hearing record outlining my priorities for the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act. I look forward to working with you to craft an NDAA that supports our servicemembers, keeps our country safe, and advances our national security priorities.

As the United States continues to navigate escalating threats from our global adversaries, we must prepare for the modern-day challenges of great power competition. The nature of warfare is changing, and we must be attentive to unconventional threats, like malicious gray zone tactics. Long discussed among national security policy experts, the “gray zone” refers to a wide swath of aggressive actions – like cyber-attacks, support for hostile proxy groups, and hostage diplomacy – that aim to weaken the U.S. and its allies without escalating to acts of war.

I have offered a number of proposals that would equip the United States with a plan to identify and combat hostile gray zone tactics. I believe the President should appoint a Gray Zone Director, develop a comprehensive strategy to counter gray zone tactics, and report to Congress on interagency efforts to combat the gray zone operations of Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

As a Gold Star Son, my gratitude to our servicemembers and their families is immeasurable. Spouses of those who die in service to our nation make unimaginable sacrifices and deserve unending respect and support in return. Unfortunately, surviving spouses of federal personnel risk losing survivor benefits if they remarry under the age of 55. My legislation, the *Love Lives On Act*, would ensure military spouses are allowed to retain benefits upon remarriage no matter their age. The bill’s protections extend to surviving spouses of active-duty, veteran, and retired military personnel.

I was thrilled to pass a portion of this legislation in last year’s NDAA, granting remarried surviving spouses access to Commissary and Exchange benefits. I hope to advance the remaining pieces of the bill – allowing remarried surviving spouses to retain Survivor Benefit Plan and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, access electronic medical services, and maintain education benefits under the Fry Scholarship program – in this year’s NDAA to eliminate completely remarriage benefit reductions for anyone who dies in service to their country.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share my priorities with the Committee and I look forward to our continued collaboration.