

**Rep. Raul R. Labrador's (ID-01) statement in behalf of H.R. 3218. Submitted to the House Veterans Affairs Committee on July 17, 2017 for the record:**

Thank you Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz for scheduling this hearing on the "Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017," which includes my bill, H.R. 1112.

H.R. 1112 – the Shauna Hill Post 9/11 Education Benefits Transferability Act -- is named in honor of a wonderful young woman whose untimely death revealed an oversight in education benefits for our veterans.

I met the Hill family in 2013, when I helped present them with a Congressional Bronze Medal Shauna posthumously earned for public service, personal development and physical fitness.

Shauna was busy working to qualify for a Congressional Silver Medal when she tragically died as a result of injuries suffered in an automobile accident in Idaho.

Shauna was a junior at Eagle High School when she died. It's the same school my children attend. Shauna aspired to attend Stanford University and become a doctor.

She was a competitive figure skater and ice dancer and played the violin in the Eagle High School Orchestra. She performed with the Orchestra at New York's Carnegie Hall. The accident occurred when Shauna was on her way home from orchestra practice.

Her organs were donated and her parents have met the woman who received Shauna's heart. The couple and Shauna's sister Haley have been honored with the Spirit of the Red Cross award in Idaho for overlooked heroism.

While presenting the Congressional Award, I learned that Shauna's father, Capt. Hill had retired shortly before her death. He served 28 years as a Navy pilot and flew to protect America during three combat tours.

In the months following the tragedy, Capt. Hill was working with the Navy in an attempt to reassign his benefits. He and his wife, Heidi, have a second child, Haley, who was also planning to go to college.

With almost three decades of distinguished service, Capt. Hill qualified for full utilization of the education benefit. But the Navy said Haley wasn't eligible because education benefits under the GI Bill can't be reassigned.

The Hills asked for my help and my staff got to work.

Unfortunately, we found that the Navy's hands were tied. The law doesn't allow the transfer of education benefits after a service member has retired. No waivers are permitted -- even in such tragic cases.

I promised the Hills that I would seek a legislative remedy. The result is H.R. 1112.

My bill amends current law to permit reassignment of veterans' education benefits in cases where the designated beneficiary passes away.

Losing a child is the worst thing I can imagine.

Congress surely didn't intend to exclude the ability to transfer benefits to a surviving child or spouse when the designated beneficiary passes away before being able to use the benefits. We honor those who serve by clearing up this inconsistency and providing some small measure of relief.

Correcting this oversight will mean a great deal to the Hills. While the number of veterans' families affected won't be large, it will be a comfort to them and others facing such a terrible loss. It's the least we can do to show our gratitude.

I am grateful to my cosponsors and to Sen. Mike Crapo, who has introduced companion legislation in the Senate.

I also appreciate the support for this bill from several veterans groups including the Concerned Veterans for America, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Student Veterans of America, AMVETS, the Air Force Sergeants Association, Association of the United States Navy and the National Military Family Association.

Mr. Chairman, I have a statement from Shauna's father, Capt. Edward Hill, and ask that it be included in the record.

Thank you for including this important legislation in the bill being considered today. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.