



American Gold Star Mothers, Inc.

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Organized 4 June 1928
Incorporated 5 January 1929
Chartered by Congress 12 June 1984
Founded by Grace Darling Seibold

February 24, 2022

Ms. Elaine Luria, Chair
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs
United States House of Representatives
364 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: "Honoring Our Promise: Reviewing the Effectiveness of Services for Dependents and Survivors"

Dear Madam Chair:

On behalf of American Gold Star Mothers, Inc., we would like to again express our thanks for the opportunity to provide comments for the recent hearing. After listening to the comments from other organizations, we would like to provide some additional information.

Parents of deceased service members face a unique set of challenges. Legislation, statutes and DoD policy is fairly clear on which benefits surviving spouses, children and other dependents are eligible for. The parents, however, are in a different position. We have no real follow-up following the death. Even when the parent(s) are the beneficiaries of SGLI and/or the Death Gratuity, after those funds are distributed, we seem to fall off the radar and no longer receive ongoing communication.

Two specific challenges that have been communicated to us by parents include:

1 - Inability to access the deceased service member's military records, to include getting copies of the Form 1300, VA determination letters, etc. In some cases, there are private foundations or individual state programs that parents can receive services from, but these "proof" documents are needed.

2 - American Gold Star Mothers, Inc., just completed a round of grant awards to assist our members who are facing financial difficulties. One case was a grandmother who now has custody and is raising the minor child of the deceased service member. She has had difficulty with obtaining assistance through the military. Her request in the grant application was simply needing funds to put food on the table. This is unacceptable.

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3 - It is difficult for parents to obtain access to services such as the Army's Survivor Outreach Services that require on-post access. There is no universal access card for surviving parents to participate in these types of programs. Each individual military base requires its own identification card. A universal, all component access card needs to be developed so that parents can seek services at whatever installation is closest to their home, regardless of the branch where their service member served.

Overall, on behalf of the surviving parent population, we would advocate for better communication and assistance figuring out those gray areas that parents fall into. Sometimes it is as simple as recognizing that we, too, are a demographic still struggling with loss and in need of recognition and service.

I would be happy to discuss these points and/or address any questions you, your staff or the Committee might have. Again, thank you for providing us a seat at the table. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Jo Ann Maitland

Jo Ann Maitland
National President