



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS AND VETERANS SERVICES

NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE VETERANS CEMETERY

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Director

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TO: House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

SUBJECT: Our Nation's Hallowed Grounds: Review of America's National Cemetery Funeral Operations for Veterans and Servicemembers

WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY: Shawn Buck, Director, NH State Veterans Cemetery

The NH State Veterans Cemetery (NHSVC), established on July 1, 1997, is in Boscawen, NH, eleven miles north of Concord, NH. The first interment was conducted on November 18, 1997. As of October 31, 2024, there are 17,341 interred at the NHSVC. The 3-year average number of interments is 1,148 (746 veteran, 402 non-veteran), of which just over 80% are cremations. The NHSVC staff consists of a director, five full-time (FT) grounds maintenance, three FT administrative staff, two part-time (PT – 25 hrs/wk during warm weather months) seasonal grounds maintenance, and one PT (10 hrs/wk) administrative staff. The NHSVC totals 104 acres and has space remaining to support interments for approximately 80 more years. The NHSVC is part of the NH Department of Military Affairs and Veterans Services, which is led by the state Adjutant General.

The NH Veterans Cemetery Association (NHVCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization that provides significant financial support to the NHSVC. They helped build and support a Memorial Walkway with over 100 benches and monuments as well as a Veterans Heritage Learning Center that highlights contributions of NH veterans to our nation's defense.

The Veterans Cemetery Grants Program (VCGP) is an excellent example of an outstanding federal/state partnership. The NHSVC submitted a proposal to expand our columbarium space as we approached 4 years of plots remaining. Upon hitting the 4-year mark, our proposal was elevated to top priority and approved. Our \$5.3 million project, set to begin this month, will add 3,280 columbarium niches and 4,225 in-ground cremation plots, which should be sufficient for at least an additional 10 years of cremation interments. The VCGP consistently communicates and advises the NHSVC regarding the expansion project. In addition, the VCGP also holds informative quarterly conference calls with all state and tribal veteran cemeteries.

The NHSVC is proud to be one of the first state veterans' cemeteries to put the Burial Equity for Guards and Reserves Act into practice. The state implemented the statute on June 1, 2022, and conducted the first burial equity interment on June 9, 2022. Through October 31, 2024, the NHSVC has conducted 97 interments, including 16 dependents, under the Burial Equity for Guards and Reserves Act.

Military Honors at the NHSVC vary based on the military branch of service. In many cases, providing dignified honors to our veterans appears to be a nuisance to the branch of service, rather than a reverent tribute to a veteran. Sometimes, the honors teams appear to have received little training. Worse, personnel reductions have led to services with only one service member in attendance (usually with the Air Force). At the NHSVC, we often supplement the one honor guard member with a retired NCO who plays live Taps and assists with the

flag fold. In the past, he would receive a stipend when he was the second team member, but that stipend is being reconsidered. He does not receive a stipend when he assists another branch of service. We are grateful when Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) help provide portions of military honors. However, not having currently serving uniformed service members sends a message to families and guests about the importance placed on honoring veterans for their service.

We are grateful for our partnership with the NCA and the VCGP. State and tribal veterans' cemeteries play a critical role honoring our veterans and connecting veterans to our local communities. This connection is pivotal to civil-military relations, recruiting, and retention.