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**TESTIMONY  
OF THE  
NATIONAL FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION**

**BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL  
AFFAIRS**

**MARCH 26, 2025**

Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member Pappas, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the nearly 20,000 licensed funeral directors and embalmers across the nation who are members of the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA). I am Lesley Witter, Senior Vice President of Advocacy for the National Funeral Directors Association.

The role of funeral directors in ensuring that veterans receive a dignified funeral and burial cannot be overstated. The vital collaboration between funeral directors, Congress, the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), and the Department of Defense (DoD) is crucial in supporting bereaved Veteran families during their time of profound grief and loss.

Funeral directors work hand-in-hand with the Department of Veterans Affairs to coordinate funeral and burial services, assist families in filing benefit claims, ensure veterans receive proper grave markers, and collaborate with the Department of Defense and veterans' service organizations to provide appropriate military honors. While funeral directors are dedicated to ensuring that military honors are properly rendered, they also play a crucial role in helping families organize personalized services that celebrate the life of their loved one and honor their selfless service to our country.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you, Ranking Member Pappas, Committee Members, and staff for holding this important hearing. Your efforts to advance vital legislation that will help ease the emotional burden on the grieving families of our nations heroes is deeply appreciated.

### **H.R. 647: Ensuring Veterans' Final Resting Place Act of 2025**

Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin by thanking Rep. Yakym for his efforts to address this nuanced, but incredibly important, issue. I appreciate the Committee's efforts to address concerns raised by survivor families about a provision in section 2207 of P.L. 116-315 that authorized the VA to provide a veterans' survivor, an urn or a plaque in *lieu* of the veteran's burial in a VA national cemetery, thus taking away the eligibility of that veteran for a ground burial at a later date.

Currently, families of veterans who wish to bury their loved ones together after a veteran's survivor chooses an urn or plaque are not allowed to inter their veteran loved one in a VA national cemetery with their family members.

Under current law, families are forced to make difficult decisions with permanent consequences that they may not be fully able to comprehend during their time of mourning. We are concerned that a grieving spouse may decide to claim the urn benefit without realizing that their decision impacts the veteran's future eligibility for ground burial. It is unreasonable to

expect a grieving spouse to mourn his/her loss, to plan a funeral, and consider their own their own final disposition options and eligibility for ground burial in a VA national cemetery.

NFDA supports H.R. 647 which is commonsense legislation that would allow families to inter their veteran loved ones in a VA national cemetery even if they previously opted for an urn or plaque, ensuring families have flexibility to make the best decision for their loved one's final resting place. This legislation provides a thoughtful solution to a problem that adds unnecessary stress and grief to veteran families, and we encourage passage of this legislation.

### **H.R. 1344: Dennis and Lois Krisfalusy Act**

Mr. Chairman, I am honored to speak in support of H.R. 1344, the Dennis and Lois Krisfalusy Act today. I want to thank Rep. Resenthaler for his efforts to ensure that no veteran or family member is denied the recognition they rightfully deserve for their service to our nation.

As you know, NCA's authority under 38 U.S.C. § 2306(b)(2) to provide this benefit is currently limited to those family members who passed away on or after November 11, 1998. This arbitrary and outdated restriction prohibits the Department of Veteran Affairs from providing a memorial headstone or marker for military spouses and dependents if they passed after that date.

H.R. 1344 corrects an injustice by allowing the Department of Veteran Affairs to provide memorial headstones or markers for veterans, their spouses, and dependent children, regardless of when they passed away, ensuring that military families are properly honored together. By fixing this injustice, we're ensuring that families like the Krisfalusy family can be laid to rest together and memorialized with dignity. NFDA encourages passage of this legislation.

### **H.R. 1228: Prioritizing Veterans' Survivors Act**

Mr. Chairman, in preparation for today's testimony, I spoke with funeral directors who assist grieving families as they navigate their way through the sometimes complicated process of applying for benefits from multiple agencies within the Department of Veteran Affairs, including the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA).

The Office of Survivor Assistance (OSA) is a crucial resource overseeing all benefits and services furnished by the Department of Veteran Affairs to survivors and dependents of deceased Veterans. Recently, the Office of Survivors' Assistance was moved out of the Office of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, thus hampering OSA's ability to serve as a principal advisor to the Secretary on policies affecting survivor families.

NFDA believes there should be no barrier between the Office of Survivors' Assistance and the Office of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. For this reason, we support H.R. 1228 and encourage passage of this legislation.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member Pappas, and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the National Funeral Directors I want to thank you for your tireless leadership, dedication, and diligent work in support of our nations veterans and their families.

In closing, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of funeral service and NFDA and affirm our unwavering commitment to honoring our nation's veterans and their families

I hope that my testimony has provided valuable insights, and I am happy to address any questions you may have.

Thank you.