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**TESTIMONY OF RABBI RAPHAEL B. BUTLER, PRESIDENT OF THE AFIKIM  
FOUNDATION IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 2701, THE “*FALLEN SERVICEMEMBERS  
RELIGIOUS HERITAGE RESTORATION ACT*” BEFORE THE DISABILITY  
ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE  
VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**JUNE 24, 2025**

Chairman Luttrell and Ranking Member McGarvey, on behalf of the non-profit Afikim Foundation ([www.afikimfoundation.org](http://www.afikimfoundation.org)), I am honored to submit this written testimony in strong support of H.R. 2701, the *Fallen Servicemembers Religious Heritage Restoration Act*.

The Afikim Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to a number of educational endeavors designed to inspire, motivate, inform and transform young people and adults. For example, Afikim’s *One Soul* exhibit on the role played by the U.S. Army in liberating the Nazi death camps at the close of World War II told an important and poignant story of liberation, hope, remembrance and resilience. I understand full well the importance of making sure future generations understand and value the many sacrifices that have been made through American history to preserve, protect and promote our democracy and our unique freedoms.

That's why I strongly endorse and support H.R. 2701. This important bill will ensure that brave Americans who gave their lives for their country are properly and appropriately honored by a grateful nation.

An estimated 900 Jewish American soldiers killed in World War I and World War II, and buried overseas in U.S. military cemeteries were, for various reasons, mistakenly buried under Latin Crosses. In the vast majority of instances, these mistakes were made inadvertently. But, the mistakes were unfortunately made and these brave soldiers were buried under the incorrect marker.

It's important to note that some 2,000,000 people a year visit the American World War I and World War II cemeteries on foreign soil. These visitors must understand and see the sacrifices that were made by *all* Americans to defend and preserve democracy.

Jewish American soldiers who fought and died for their country must have their heritage properly recognized and honored. Our government shares a solemn responsibility to ensure that every American soldier killed in action and buried overseas is properly and appropriately honored.

Now, more than ever, when our country is unfortunately experiencing an increase in anti-semitism, it's vital to recognize the vital contribution made by Jewish American soldiers in World War I and World War II - especially those soldiers that paid the ultimate price. The story

of these brave soldiers who gave their lives for America is a very American story. Their sacrifice and service must be properly honored and recognized. That is exactly what H.R. 2701 would do.

The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) does a remarkable job in maintaining and administering the United States' military cemeteries overseas. They are committed to ensuring that every soldier buried in their cemeteries is appropriately honored. The ABMC is committed to "getting it right."

H.R. 2701 will provide the ABMC with the modest resources it needs to partner with outside experts in researching and identifying Jewish American service members buried at American military cemeteries overseas who were buried under markers incorrectly representing their religion and heritage.

This legislation is long overdue. Most importantly, it is the right thing to do. I respectfully urge its favorable consideration. Thank you.

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