



## **Statement for the Record**

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For the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance  
and Memorial Affairs

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Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member McGarvey, and distinguished members of the  
Subcommittee:

Gold Star Spouses of America (GSSA) is a nationally recognized, nonprofit organization representing the surviving spouses of fallen service members from all eras and all branches of the Armed Forces. GSSA has worked to ensure that the voices of surviving spouses are heard and that the benefits and policies intended to support them reflect both the enduring nature of their sacrifice and the realities of their lives.

The legislation under consideration in this hearing closely aligns with GSSA's core priorities, including protecting survivor benefits, eliminating inequities and outdated penalties, strengthening access to health care and financial stability, and ensuring that surviving spouses and their families are treated with dignity and fairness. Collectively, these bills address longstanding gaps in law and policy that affect survivors' ability to heal, remain economically secure, and move forward after loss.

While GSSA appreciates the breadth of proposals before the Subcommittee and their importance to the broader veteran and military community, we respectfully focus our testimony on a select number of measures that directly affect surviving spouses and families across the country.

**The Love Lives On Act of 2025 (H.R. 1004)**

GSSA appreciates Congress's recent efforts to modernize survivor benefit policies, including the elimination of the outdated "holds oneself out" penalty and the adoption of more inclusive definitions of surviving spouse. These changes represent meaningful progress toward ensuring survivor benefits are administered fairly and reflect the diversity of today's military families.

Despite this progress, the remarriage penalty continues to affect many surviving spouses, once again highlighting the need for additional legislative action to fully eliminate these inequities. Under current law, surviving spouses who remarry before age 55 risk losing critical benefits. This forces an unnecessary and deeply personal choice between long-term financial security and the ability to rebuild their lives after the loss of a service member.

GSSA strongly believes this age-based penalty must be removed. Survivor benefits are earned through service and sacrifice and should not be conditioned on marital status. Service members served with the understanding that their families would be cared for in their absence, and that promise should not dissolve if a surviving spouse chooses to remarry. Eliminating the remarriage penalty would allow surviving spouses to retain essential financial support and, in some cases, restore access to health care if a subsequent marriage ends.

These reforms acknowledge the fundamental truth that the sacrifices borne by surviving families do not end when they seek companionship, stability, or happiness later in life. Love does, indeed, live on beyond the loss of a service member, and it is the responsibility of Congress to ensure that the commitments made to military families are honored.

We are proud to stand alongside multiple veteran service organizations, military service organizations, and survivor organizations in leading the charge on this legislation, and we look forward to working with the Subcommittee to see it fully enacted this Congress.

### **The Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2025 (H.R. 1685)**

GSSA strongly supports the Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2025 and appreciates Congress's continued attention to the devastating impact of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) on veterans and their families. ALS is a rapidly progressive and fatal disease that places extraordinary physical, emotional, and financial burdens not only on affected veterans, but also on the spouses and caregivers who support them through every stage of illness.

For surviving spouses, delays in diagnosis, service connection, or access to benefits<sup>1</sup> can have lasting consequences that extend well beyond the veteran's lifetime. Legislation that improves access to care, streamlines benefits, and recognizes the unique nature of ALS is crucial in ensuring that families are not left navigating uncertainty and hardship during an already overwhelming period. GSSA believes that supporting veterans with ALS is inseparable from supporting their families.

The Justice for ALS Veterans Act provides the surviving spouses of veterans who pass away while suffering from ALS with the "8-year provision enhanced DIC" of 38 U.S.C. § 1311(a)(2). This provision historically is for families who have cared for a totally disabled veteran for an extended period. Long-term care can come with multiple financial hardships, including leaving employment to care for the veteran and additional caregiving costs. According to a 2024 RAND veteran caregiver study, military and veteran caregivers incur an estimated \$8,583 in annual out-of-pocket costs associated with their caregiving responsibilities. This is the average, and according to the American Journal of Managed Care, the caregiving cost of ALS is 3 times higher than that of other disabilities, averaging \$47,450 per year.<sup>1</sup> These costs mount quickly and because ALS patients are unlikely to live the 8-years required for the enhanced DIC,<sup>2</sup> the families will never see these important supplemental payments.

This bill recognizes that the cost of caring for a disabled veteran is not always determined by the length of time they are cared for, but that some conditions come with severe costs not recognized by the traditional system.

The second effect of this bill is to require the VA to consider additional conditions that can be considered in the same manner as ALS for the purposes of providing enhanced DIC benefits. Because ALS is a unique case, we caution the VA from using diagnosis as the sole determining factor in future expansions of this important benefit. Participation in caregiver programs, or the spouse leaving their employment to care for the veteran, may be more accurate metrics for caregiving burden.

When a service member dies from ALS, surviving spouses frequently face sudden loss of income, mounting medical debt, and complex benefit transitions at a moment of profound grief. Policies that acknowledge the severity and service-connected nature of ALS help ensure that surviving families are treated with fairness, dignity, and compassion. GSSA urges swift passage of this legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> Morley, Melissa, Marisa Aurora, Kolton Gustafson, Chani S. Seals, Ari Feuer, Sana Datar, Sarah Parvanta, Neil Thakur, and Kuldip D. Dave. "Medicare Expenditures in the First Year of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Diagnosis." *American Journal of Managed Care* 31, no. 10 (October 20, 2025): e308–e312

<sup>2</sup> ALS Association. "Stages of ALS." Accessed February 2, 2026. <https://www.als.org/understanding-als/stages>

## **The Veterans Burial Allowance and Reimbursement Act of 2026 (H.R. 6943)**

GSSA strongly supports the Veterans Burial Allowance and Reimbursement Act of 2026, which would correct a long-standing statutory anomaly in the VA's burial benefit structure and ensure equitable treatment of veterans' families at one of the most difficult moments they face.

Under current law, the maximum burial benefits payable for a non-service-connected veteran's death total \$2,004, consisting of a \$1,002 burial allowance and \$1,002 for a plot or interment allowance.<sup>3</sup> Paradoxically, the maximum burial benefit payable for a service-connected veteran's death is capped at \$2,000.<sup>4</sup>

This disparity is not the result of intentional policy preference, but rather the consequence of how Congress structured cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) across two different statutory provisions of Title 38.

Burial benefits for non-service-connected deaths are governed by 38 U.S.C. § 2303, while burial benefits for service-connected deaths are governed by 38 U.S.C. § 2307.<sup>5</sup> In 2001, Congress amended § 2307 to increase the service-connected burial allowance from \$1,500 to \$2,000.<sup>4</sup> However, unlike § 2303, § 2307 does not include a COLA provision.

In 2010, Congress amended § 2303 to establish a \$700 burial allowance for non-service-connected deaths and, critically, added subsection (c), which provides for annual COLAs.<sup>5</sup> Congress did not add a comparable COLA provision to § 2307 at that time, nor has it done so since.

As a result, although the base statutory amounts were originally aligned in principle, the non-service-connected burial benefit has steadily increased over time due to COLAs, while the service-connected burial benefit has remained frozen. As of October 1, 2025, the total burial benefit for non-service-connected deaths surpassed the service-connected maximum by \$4.<sup>6</sup>

H.R. 6943 corrects this inequity by consolidating burial benefits for both service-connected and non-service-connected deaths under 38 U.S.C. § 2303 and repealing § 2307. In doing so, the bill ensures that all veteran burial benefits are treated equally under the same statutory framework, including access to annual COLAs.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, "Burial Allowance," updated October 1, 2024, <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance/>

<sup>4</sup> 38 U.S.C. § 2307 (2024).

<sup>5</sup> 38 U.S.C. §§ 2303, 2307 (2024).

<sup>6</sup> Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-103, § 501, 115 Stat. 976, 993 (2001).

<sup>7</sup> Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-275, § 501(a), 124 Stat. 2864, 2872 (2010)

Importantly, H.R. 6943 does not alter the base burial allowance established in 2010. Rather, it ensures that future adjustments apply uniformly, eliminating disparities caused solely by statutory structure rather than congressional intent.

For surviving spouses and families, burial benefits are not abstract budgetary line items — they are part of how the nation honors the service and sacrifice of veterans. It is deeply troubling for Gold Star families to discover that a veteran who died of service-connected causes may receive less burial assistance than a veteran whose death was not service-connected.

Congress's intent to equalize burial benefits was clearly expressed in 2010. H.R. 6943 simply completes that work by aligning the statutory mechanisms that govern benefit growth over time. This bill restores parity, preserves congressional intent, and eliminates an outcome that is both confusing and unjust to surviving families.

GSSA urges Congress to pass H.R. 6943. The bill is straightforward, fiscally responsible, and long overdue. It ensures that all veterans' families are treated equitably and that service-connected sacrifice is never unintentionally undervalued.

We thank the Subcommittee for its attention to this important issue and strongly support the swift passage of this legislation.

## **Conclusion**

Gold Star Spouses of America appreciates the Subcommittee's attention to legislation that meaningfully improves the lives of surviving military families. The measures discussed today reflect important progress toward fairness, transparency, and dignity for survivors, while also clarifying the work that remains.

As Congress continues its oversight and legislative efforts, GSSA looks forward to ongoing collaboration, including future discussions focused on strengthening survivor benefits like increasing Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for surviving spouses, a national priority for our organization. We stand ready to work with the Subcommittee to ensure that the promises made to service members and their families are upheld.

## **Gold Star Spouses of America, Inc.**

Gold Star Spouses of America is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the surviving spouses of military service members and veterans who have made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our country. Our mission is to provide meaningful support, advocacy, education, and a sense of community for Gold Star families. Through our programs, we work to ensure that the needs of these spouses and their families are heard, addressed, and prioritized by policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels.

Gold Star Spouses of America, Inc. is listed as an approved resource in the National Resource Directory ([NRD.gov](http://NRD.gov)), Military OneSource, and recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs for volunteer opportunities within the department's Center for Development and Civic Engagement.