



Gold Star Wives of America, Inc

Tanya L. Wilson-Thomas: SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING
TESTIMONY: 2/3/2026

Good Morning Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member McGarvey, members of the Subcommittee. My name is Tanya L. Wilson-Thomas, surviving spouse of U.S. Marine Dwight Anthony Thomas, Sr. I am a member of Gold Star Wives of America, Inc., which was founded in 1945 by WWII widows. We are the surviving spouses of our nation's military service members. Operating under a Congressional Charter established by law, we were created as an advocacy organization, to support policies that improve quality of life for military survivors and their children due to their service member spouses' death on active duty or, as a result of service-connected conditions. We have been advocating for such families for 80 years and are still committed to doing so today.

I am here to express support for H.R.1004- The Love Lives On Act and H.R.1685- Justice for ALS Veterans. I am providing testimony on only these two bills as they are most impactful to our membership: They provide very meaningful support to surviving spouses. We urge the Committee and the Congress to see them through to enactment. While our members each have different journeys, we have all arrived at the same destination. We have found ourselves experiencing the trauma of the loss of our spouse, the upheaval of our lives and the weight of learning to incorporate that loss into our everyday existence. We are also tasked with simultaneously helping our children to do the same, all while trying to figure out how to provide as sole provider. The Love Lives On Act affirms our nation's responsibility to stand with Gold Star Wives and Husbands far beyond their moment of loss. It provides essential recognition by acknowledging that our sacrifices are perpetual, just as the benefits provided to spouses have a perpetual "indemnification" purpose that should not be threatened. It asserts that honoring service must emphatically include honoring those who constantly endure life with the daily rigors of its sacrifices, along with its lasting associated costs.

My late husband, Dwight Sr. was a proud U.S. Marine. He was an electrician responsible for electricity and generators on base and on deployments while we were stationed at Cherry Point Naval Air Station, NC. His unit received orders to go on emergency standby in preparation to deploy to the Persian Gulf. They had trained for this and he was so excited. I helped him pack his sea bag as he had the kids taste Meals Ready to Eat (MRE's), and explained every item going into his bag. He was so proud as he discussed the seemingly unimpenerable kevlar material that the Corps. had recently added to the uniforms and helmets. But just before his unit got the call, my husband collapsed with a brain hemorrhage lodged in his brain stem and soon after underwent brain surgery. He was 23. I was 22. Our children were 2 and 4. So I halted my academic and professional pursuits to become my husband's long term military caregiver. After extended hospital stays, Dwight was permanently released home to convalesce. He was in pain and suffered greatly over those years due to several service-connected conditions until his untimely death, eight years later. These events changed the trajectory of my young family's world for some time to come. My health, stability, wellbeing, education, career path, spiritual life, etc. and that of our two children, all fell into question. Suddenly with very little resources, for a service connected death, I had to just figure it all out. Support for The Love Lives On Act affirms that our nation does not and will not forget, but remembers that although these service members are no longer physically here, their service and sacrifices are still recorded in the annals of our nation's American history. It's been given and cannot be undone. The fact that these service members--our family members, are no longer here does not mean that their military service, nor our family's contributions just vanish into thin air.

This Act provides the reinstatement of the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP). It also provides reinstatement of Tricare benefits when a subsequent marriage ends in divorce or death. Currently a survivor would lose that eligibility. This bill ensures that military survivors are not forgotten in a real and tangible way but provided the resources to rebuild stable, productive lives after such sacrifices, which were paid out on behalf of a grateful nation.

Gold Star Wives also strongly supports H.R. 1685. Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) is a devastating and unforgiving disease that has taken the lives of those who served this nation with honor. The families after acting as their loved one's military caregiver, are left to bear unimaginable loss. Then, because of ALS's rapid progression, they are often left with significant financial loss due to the law's inflexibility in recognizing that progression. The Report on Additional Medical Conditions should commence without delay. Gold Star Wives of America Inc. urges this Committee to extend eligibility for increased Survivor Benefits to all families who service member died due to ALS before October 1, 2025. All Surviving Spouses with ALS related deaths have similar experiences, irrespective of the date of death. This bill represents accountability to our service members. It acknowledges respect and compassion for their families by streamlining access to care, benefits and much needed answers. Supporting H.R. 1685 is not only good policy but it is our moral obligation.

Members of the Subcommittee, I close asking for your support of these bills and for your votes to advance them. I ask that you engage with each other constructively in how to accomplish moving these bills beyond this first step. For 80 years Gold Star Wives has seen this Committee -- created in 1946, nearly the same age as our organization -- come together on issues affecting veterans and survivors." We are asking that you do so again. We are asking that you proudly build on the foundation of President Abraham Lincoln's pledge to "care for those who borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan." He knew that this was morally just. We know that you believe the same and, again, ask for your support.
Thank you for the opportunity to hold forum with you today.

Respectfully Submitted By,



Tanya L. Wilson-Thomas