

**House Veterans Affairs Committee**  
**October 20, 2021 Legislative Hearing**  
**Statement for the Record**  
**Re. Gold Star Spouses Non-Monetary Benefits Act (HR 4191)**  
**Rep. Elise Stefanik (NY-21)**

Thank you, Chairwoman Luria and Ranking Member Nehls for the opportunity to advocate for America's Gold Star families today.

Our Gold Star families suffer incomprehensible loss and face tremendous hardships in rebuilding their lives following the loss of their loved ones. They face challenges with access to healthcare services, education benefits, counseling services, and most of all, financial difficulties. In some cases, they have lived as single-income families, and this burden just becomes too much to bear.

The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have supplemented our Gold Star families with a number of benefits to help them stay afloat as they adjust to these most difficult of circumstances. However, should a Gold Star spouse decide to remarry in the course of rebuilding their lives, they are penalized with the loss of these desperately needed benefits. This so-called remarriage penalty is why I was pleased to introduce H.R. 4191, the Gold Star Spouses Non-Monetary Benefits Act, along with Congressman Andy Kim, in June.

As the chief advocate for Fort Drum and the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, the Army's most deployed division since September 11th, I directly represent Gold Star families who have been burdened by the denial of these benefits and suffered a loss of faith in DoD and the VA for having broken faith with them and their families' service.

Under this bill, our Gold Star spouses would not be subject to loss or suspension of survivors benefits simply because they decide to remarry. It takes courage to pick up the pieces of their lives and continue on. Yet, the very country that promised to honor their loved ones and take care of them continues to jeopardize that emotional and financial stability by depriving them of their benefits earned.

This outcome is extremely troubling, and the legislation I have brought forth would preserve Gold Star benefits regardless of marital status. It directs the DoD and the VA to halt the suspension of Gold Star spouses' non-monetary benefits based on remarriage. This would specifically affect non-competitive hiring preference, access to counseling, educational benefits, on-post services and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) privileges, and health and dental benefits.

The courageous men and women who gave their last full measure of devotion defending our nation, did so trusting and believing that their families would be properly cared for. It is time that we uphold our promise to them. We would not be unique in righting this wrong; our allies in the United Kingdom have already repealed such penalties affecting survivors benefits in April 2015. It is time we join them in ending the loss of benefits for our Gold Star spouse, and it starts with the first step outlined in H.R. 4191 – eliminating the remarriage penalty for non-monetary benefits.

I am pleased that my colleagues on this panel have brought forth legislation to address this long overdue issue. It is my hope that Congress will codify our efforts into law and protect the devastated families that are working to put their lives back together.

We owe this much to our Gold Star families and the men and women that made the ultimate sacrifice. I look forward to working with my colleagues to honor their loved ones' service and ensure their families' well-being.

Thank you,



Elise M. Stefanik  
Member of Congress  
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