

**House Veterans Affairs Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs**  
**March 29, 2022, Legislative Hearing**  
**Written Statement**  
**Supporting All Veteran Families Act**  
**Rep. Marie Newman (IL-03)**

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Thank you, Chairwoman Luria, Ranking Member Nehls, and all members of the subcommittee for including H.R. 6849, the Supporting All Veteran Families Act, in today's legislative hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today.

This important legislation would update Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) statute to be more inclusive of same sex veteran spouses and surviving spouses. It would also remove the outdated "hold yourself out to be married" language that unfairly implies shame and judgement.

When the *2015 Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court case fully legalized same-sex marriages across the nation, the VA recognized all same-sex marriages regardless of a veteran's state of residence. This ensured all eligible same-sex veteran spouses were able to receive spousal benefits such as pensions, VA home loans, medical coverage, and more. However, after more than a decade, Congress has yet to pass legislation to formally update VA statute to reflect this ruling and recognize same-sex veteran spouses by law.

Currently, VA statute still defines a veteran spouse as "a person of the opposite sex who is a wife or husband." While the VA does not enforce this outdated definition, it is long past time we update this language so that we fully recognize all veteran spouses and ensure their access to benefits are forever protected. That is why I introduced the Supporting All Veteran Families Act, along with Representatives Kaiuli'i Kahele of Hawaii and Mondaire Jones of New York, to update the definition of a veteran spouse and ensure that all our servicemembers, veterans, and their families receive equal access to their hard-earned VA benefits.

Again, thank you, Chairwoman Luria and Ranking Member Nehls, for your unwavering commitment to our nation's veterans and their families, and hearing this legislation to address this long overdue issue. I urge all members of the subcommittee to support this important legislation.