



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1251

Department of Veterans Affairs - Burial in State Veterans' Cemeteries - Spouses and Dependents

March 8, 2022

Chairwoman Pendergrass and Honorable Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

My name is CAPTAIN Lynn Nash. I am the Communications Director for the Maryland Military Coalition and I served 30 years in both the Army and the United States Public Health Service. I am eligible for burial in a Maryland State Veterans Cemetery, as is my husband. I am here today to support HB 1251.

These past years have been very difficult for veterans and their spouses. Many have died as a result of the pandemic. Under current state law, eligible spouses and dependents of veterans must provide the cost of burial with their sponsor in one of the five Maryland State Veterans Cemeteries. Currently, the costs for opening and closing of a gravesite is \$828.00 which must be paid when an eligible dependent is buried in the veteran's plot. The cost for the veteran is FREE. As many of you know, there are many families within the veterans' community who simply cannot afford the expense. Even those who have insurance find it difficult as funeral expenses have escalated over the years.

This bill is unfunded, but we are not talking about a lot of money. The State Dept. of Veterans Affairs' (MDVA) [Annual Report](#) (2021) shows that 3929 veterans and dependents were interred in our state veterans' cemeteries in 2020. This is high, likely because of the pandemic. Over the past five (5) years, on average, 3405 veterans and dependents have been buried in a state cemetery. The number of eligible dependents interred in 2021 was 1407 or 60% of the total number of burials (3736) according to the MDVA. For the current year to date, 1230 dependents, or 64% of the total, have been interred with their veteran sponsor. Therefore, if you do the math, based on a rate of 62% of the average number of veterans interred in state cemeteries per year -- 3405 -- the annual cost of dependent burials would be approximately \$1.747 million per year (3405 X .62 x \$828). Accordingly, the Maryland Military Coalition **recommends an AMENDMENT to HB 1251 to cover the cost of the proposed legislative change.**

Finally, the MMC notes that the language in the bill conforms to existing state and Federal law governing eligibility for the burial of veterans in Maryland state veterans' cemeteries.

For several years, Leroy Thornton, a distinguished Korean War Veteran and leader in the veteran's community, has sought to waive the burial expenses for spouses and eligible dependents of veterans who

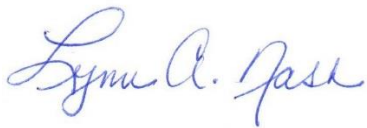
**1101 Mercantile Lane, Suite 260 • Largo, Maryland 20774
(301) 583-8687 • (800) 808-4517**

are buried in Maryland Veteran Cemeteries. Commander Thornton has always believed that eligible dependents should be free. The MMC agrees as well. HB 1251, sponsored by Delegate Chanel Branch, 45th Legislative District, and others will accomplish Commander Thornton's dream to waive the costs for eligible dependents – and in particular the spouse of an eligible veteran.

The Maryland Military Coalition, is a voluntary, non-partisan organization representing 19 veteran service organizations who, in turn, serve over 150,000 Maryland uniformed services men and women and their families. The Coalition **strongly supports House Bill 1251 with amendment** and asks for your **favorable** report.

Thank you to Delegate Branch for sponsoring this important legislation.

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lynn A. Nash". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lynn A. Nash, CAPTAIN, U.S. Public Health Service (Ret)
Communications Director