

Mr. Chairman, Madam Chair, and members of this committee. Thank you for the time and this opportunity to address you about Senate Bill 286 on the burial of an eligible spouses of veterans in state veterans cemeteries without charge.

My name is Joseph Pruden and my testimony today is on behalf of the members of The American Legion in the State of Maryland. American Legion members – all veterans – are active community members in all 23 Maryland counties and Baltimore City.

In brief, our organization believes that SB 286 should be passed as is.

The costs of burying a spouse in one of our MDVA run cemeteries minimal.

Decreases in state funding for this program would be offset by increases in federal funding.

This program does not necessitate an increase in the size of our Veterans Cemeteries.

It is a small gesture that the State of Maryland can make to its veterans to say thank you to those who have served and already face many stresses when they return home to continue their lives in and out of uniform.

Let us remove one more concern from the lives of our veterans and their families.

Our Department of Veterans Affairs is in favor of this bill.

Your Fiscal and Policy Note states, “The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government operations or finances”.

On behalf of the 100,000 households or our American Legion family who live, work, purchase goods and services, pay taxes and vote in the State of Maryland, I urge this committee to report favorably on SB 286.

We ask further that you then urge you colleagues to vote in favor of this bill.

Thank you for your time and attention.



The American Legion, Department of Maryland

WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO, AND WE NEED YOU

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WHO WE ARE:

The American Legion is a 501 (c) 19 Not for Profit, Community Based, Non-Partisan, Patriotic, Veterans Service Organization that was founded in March of 1919 and Chartered by the United States Congress in September of 1919.

We are comprised of some 12,000 American Legion Posts located in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, France, Mexico, the Philippines and Puerto Rico; hence, the term "Department", rather than "State", is used as a more descriptive term.

In The American Legion, Department of Maryland we have a total of 135 active American Legion Posts located within each

of the 23 Counties and in Baltimore City, with a Post presence in virtually every community of the State. In both membership and number of Posts, we are by far the largest veteran's service organization in Maryland.

For more than 100 years, The American Legion had stood on four great pillars or principles: (1) Taking care of veterans and

their families; (2) Supporting a strong national and domestic security posture for America and its Allies, including adequate staffing and funding for the U.S. Departments of Defense, Labor, Homeland Security, State and Veterans Affairs; (3) Educating and caring for our Children and Youth; and (4) Participating in and furthering Americanism and patriotic holidays, such as, but not limited to Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Armed Forces Day and Flag Day. Our advocacy revolves around these four pillars, and we remain nonpartisan in the furtherance of our mission.

Our American Legion Family spans more than **100,000 households, the members of which live, work, purchase goods**

and services, pay taxes and vote in the State of Maryland...all of **which further contributes to the economic well-being within their respective communities, counties, Baltimore City, and the State of Maryland.**

Many times the refrain of The American Legion is not keeping up with the times, nor providing valuable services that the Veterans and Communities need any longer is used as a means to denigrate the organization and its accomplishments, and most times it is used by those not informed, or from outside the organization. This document should provide facts to support the argument that The American Legion is still relevant, still strong, and still the best advocate for our Veterans and Communities. Each Post controls their programs locally, so a Post can tailor its service to its community needs. Join a local Posts and continue serving your community, State, and Nation.

WHAT WE DO:

The American Legion of Maryland (Posts, Squadrons, Auxiliary and Headquarters offices) contributes materially to the economic well-being of the State of Maryland by employing more than 1,300 tax-paying employees living in the state of Maryland. Our employee payroll is estimated to exceed \$30,000,000 annually.

During the past year, our **Charitable Contributions** to needy families, churches, government programs supporting the four pillars, and a host of other State recognized not-for profit charitable organizations **exceeded \$2 million, and these donations and grants continue year after year.** In addition, our members make cash and in-kind donations to and contribute tens of thousands of volunteer man-hours each year to many worthy charitable causes, including Special Olympics, VA Medical Centers and Clinics, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Other Maryland Military Treatment Facilities and Out-Patient Clinics, Fisher Houses, Johns Hopkins Hospital's Children's Miracle Network, Maryland State Veterans Cemeteries and the Charlotte Hall Maryland State Veterans Home. **In 2018 our members volunteered 360,976 hours to community service at a value of over \$9 million...** a few examples worthy of your attention follows:

- The American Legion is the largest identifiable Blood Donor organization in America and in Maryland. For 2018, The American Legion Family in Maryland reported 2,805 pints of blood collected by our Legion Family during sponsored blood drives.
- The American Legion, since our founding, has been a strong sponsor and supporter of Boy and Girl Scout Troops in America and in Maryland. Legion Posts sponsor 46 Scout Units and expended over \$137,108 in support of these youth.
- In Maryland, The American Legion scholarship donations to deserving college and pre-college level students ranks second to none. Total scholarships given in 2018 exceeded \$275,000..
- The Department Service Office annually assists and represents over 1,000 Veterans with VA Benefits paperwork, and is responsible for nearly \$18,000,000 in awards for various VA benefits each year. Through the diligence of our Department and Post Service Officers, several veterans received retroactive compensation for disabilities over \$250,000 each. The American Legion excels in Veteran Employment assistance in all communities.
- The Maryland American Legion owns two Youth Camps, one on the Frederick-Washington County line operated by the Frederick County YMCA for the benefit of our community, and the other in Prince George's County which is operated by the Southern Maryland District Council. These camps including all facilities thereat are available for one-day or longer (but not to exceed a period contrary to established rules and regulations of each camp) for use by youth groups, churches, and others on a first come-first served basis, at minimal cost. These youth camps allow over 6,000 Maryland youth and many more Marylanders to enjoy the outdoors and learn values that last a lifetime.

- Many Maryland American Legion Posts are available during emergencies for use as National and Local Civil Defense Shelters, Disaster Relief and Homeland Security Training Facilities and to temporarily shelter, feed and cloth families during natural and/or man-made disasters and riots. Located in every County and in most communities around the State they are an available resource in time of need.
- Maryland American Legion Youth Programs include: (1) Boys and Girls State Programs which consist of a one-week concentrated study of the U. S. Constitution and an intense interactive learning experience pertaining to the legislative process and operations of local, state and national governmental entities; (2) American Legion Baseball; (3) American Legion Oratorical Contests, (4) Junior Shooting Sports, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Youth recreation leagues, and college scholarship awards. We are leaders in every aspect of community involvement. These programs cost in excess of \$750,000 annually, and the money is raised from local Posts and members.
- Under the Legion's Worldwide Family Support Network we provide both labor (over 13,000 hours) and financial support (over \$40,000) to spouses and family members left behind while the military service-member is deployed in harms way. Typical support includes lawn maintenance (shoveling snow, mowing grass, trimming shrubbery), making minor household repairs, providing free transportation and drivers, purchasing needed clothing and food and helping with emergency financial problems.
- The Department of Maryland Heroes to Hometown/Wounded Warrior fund has provided grants totaling over \$300,000 for Veterans of the current conflicts struggling with transition or in need in other areas including adaptive technologies. The goal of this fund is to quickly assess the needs and provide assistance, and we have an impact throughout the State. This program is completely funded by donation from the Legion Family and a few supporters.
- Department of MD, Veteran Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission annually makes grants over \$30,000 to support Veteran needs. The total value of donations and volunteer hours to the VA and Rehabilitation efforts by MD American Legion Family exceeds \$500,000 annually. Annual volunteer service to VA includes thousands of hours in facilities around MD.
- The Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) for needy children of Veterans, operated by The American Legion, provides aid for areas of basic needs to Veteran families with children in the household. Grants in Maryland vary depending upon the level of need and number received. Grants provided in 2018 exceeded \$100,000.

“Get Out The Vote” has been a major program at all levels (National, Department/State and Post/Community) of The American Legion since our very beginning in 1919. By Congressional Charter we are non-partisan, we do not endorse, raise money for or give preference to any person seeking public office; however, **we do strongly advocate for a wide range of LEGISLATIVE ISSUES germane to the Aims and Purposes for which The American Legion was founded and work to ensure these issues are before the elected officials, at all levels (city, county, state and national), and we ask for their support and votes.**

100 years of Making a Difference

- In 1962 through a grant from The American Legion, Department of Maryland, The Medical Eye Bank of Maryland was established, and its mission was to improve access to corneal transplants to individuals throughout Maryland. The Department operated a Christmas tree sale at Memorial Stadium annually for decades to continue support of the Eye Bank. Through the years this program has grown into an international company, merged several times (the latest being when KeraLink merged with Corneagen in 2018), and now has a worldwide mission to reverse corneal blindness through transplantation. The gift from 1962 has been used to launch a venture affecting at least hundreds of thousands worldwide in the six decades of its existence.
- Since our founding in 1919 The American Legion, Department of Maryland has been in the strongest Veteran Service Organizations and constantly advocates for Veterans, Strong Defense and Emergency Preparedness, Patriotism, and Youth in our communities, and throughout our State. We stand ready to forge the next hundred years of service, and advocacy for future generations of Veterans.

Monetary Aid and Program Costs**Other Highlights**

Emergency Aid to Veterans and Children	\$59,970	Blood Donor Pints Donated	2,805
Contributions to VA Hosp	\$123,787	Number of Donors from Post	2,109
Cost of Community Service	\$166,205	# Annual community Events	561
Boys State Costs	\$123,476	Scout Units	46
Legion Baseball Cost	\$196,764	# Youths in Scouting	1,334
Total cost of other Sports teams	\$46,636	# Schools Assisted	152
Scouting Costs	\$137,128	No. of Scholarships	175
Oratorical Costs	\$10,525	Education Hours	5,698
School Assistance Costs	\$107,534	Local Flag Presentations	569
Scholarship Costs	\$166,260	Flag Day	68
Legion Legacy Scholarship Amount	\$62,075	Veterans Day	96
Additional Educational Amounts	\$28,176	Memorial Day	98
Local Flag Presentation Costs	\$8,676	Halloween Safety and Children Safety	49
34Jr. Shooting Club Costs	\$6,850	American Legion Rider Programs	35
Cash Aid to C & Y	\$88,012	Get Out the Vote	42
Value of Goods C & Y	\$69,004	ROTC Medals Presented	130
TFA Administrative Costs	\$7,828	# of Armed Service Families Assisted	550
All Other Expenses	\$15,675		
Heroes to Hometown Grants	\$37,036	Color Guard/Honor Guard Services	
Veteran & Rehabilitation Grants	\$40,280	# Color Guard/Honor Guards	45
Family Support Network	\$12,750	Wake Services provided	66
Family Support Party and Gift Costs	\$36,455	No. of Funeral Honors	5,878
Temporary Financial Asst	\$21,370	Uniformed Group Cost	\$62,382
Legion Endowment Fund	\$8,295		
Total Other Charities	\$63,725		
National Emergency Fund	\$72,325	Veteran Employment Services	

Support Our Troops - cost to post	\$28,110	Employment Chairman	19
Uniformed Group Cost	\$62,382	Homeless Vets Chairperson	23
All Other Donations not on form	\$207,779	Post participates in Career Fairs	29
Total Monetary Program Costs/Donations	\$2,015,088	LVER/DVOP reference	88
		Placed in Employment	72
Volunteer Hours		Job Training Placement	141
Total Hours Volunteered	360,976	Homeless Vets Outreach	21
Value of Volunteer Labor	\$9,179,620		

Legion Post Contribution (Numbers include Dept Donations