

**TESTIMONY**  
**Senate Bill 490**  
**Clarence "Tiger" Davis**

Senate Bill 490, Department of Veterans Affairs – the Burial in State Veterans' Cemeteries – Spouses and Dependents would prohibit the Department from charging fees associated with the burial of an eligible spouse or dependent of a veteran.

Currently, veterans who served other than dishonorably as a member of the armed forces of the United States or as a member of the State militia ordered into service of the United States by order of the President and was killed in the line of duty can be interned without charge in a cemetery plot administered by the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs.

Eligible dependent (spouse or child) can be buried in the same plot – even before the death of the veteran; however, a fee, generally referred to as opening and closing of the gravesite costs, is charged. Currently, that fee, as of November 1, 2022, is \$893.00. Senate Bill 490 would prohibit the Department of Veterans Affairs from charging this fee.

In any given year, an average of 3400 veterans are buried in cemeteries administered by the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs. It is estimated that approximately 1300 eligible dependents are interned in these cemeteries at a cost slightly more than one million dollars.

Leroy Thornton, a Korean War Veteran, former Maryland Department Commander for the American Legion, and dedicated advocate for veterans and their families has for many years promoted this initiative to assist the families of Maryland veterans. Last year, he asked the Baltimore City Veterans Commission to assist in securing these benefits for the family of Maryland's veterans. As a former Delegate and former Chairman of the Baltimore City Veterans Commission, I asked Delegate Chantel Branch to sponsor a bill (HB 1251).

Mr. Thornton and I actively engage veterans who are in need of assistance and this includes their families. There is a significant number of veterans throughout Maryland who cannot afford the cost of a funeral for either themselves or their eligible dependents. Mr. Thornton and other service providers constantly seek resources for their comrades in need.

The discussion among veterans is that governments – local, state and federal – are "giving away money like its candy to everyone from corporate America to food stamp recipients but cannot help it's warriors," many of whom suffer from active-duty malaise.

I urge your favorable vote SB 490. Thank you!