

My name is Jeremiah Charles. I am the son of Senior Airman Gilnord Charles, who died in the line of duty when I was 17 months old and my sister was only one month old. I stand here representing the Gold Star children of Maryland.

While we are often told our parents are heroes, the reality at home is often a quiet struggle. For a Gold Star child, our "Only Parent" is our entire world. But when that parent is buried under the "red tape" of complex benefit processes—which are often so restrictive they feel impossible to navigate—our families are left financially unstable. This bill, by removing the arbitrary two-year limit, cuts through that tape.

Financial stability isn't just about money; it's about mental health. Studies show that Gold Star children face significantly higher risks of depression and suicidal ideation compared to their peers. When our surviving parent is exhausted by financial survival, they cannot focus on the intensive "self-care" required to raise grieving children. A supported parent is a present parent, and a present parent is the best defense against the mental health crises facing children like me. I have too many Gold Star friends struggling with grief and depression and add on things like food insecurity. Gold Star Families in a blink of an eye go from a 2 income household to standing in the food bank lines for dinner. The words "Thank you for your sacrifice alone, don't put food on the table."

The two-year limit on these tax benefits suggests that grief or financial need has an expiration date. It does not. By passing HB 842, you are moving beyond words of gratitude and providing tangible relief. You are telling Maryland's Gold Star children that we are seen, and that our **"Only Parent" deserve the breathing room to help us thrive, not just survive.**

I respectfully urge a **favorable** report on HB 842. Thank you for your time and for honoring my father's memory through your action.

Sincerely,

**Jeremiah Charles**

Gold Star Son of Senior Airman Gilnord Charles