

Testimony in Support of House Bill 0842

Riva Gijanto-Burris

Surviving Spouse of SFC Jeremy Burris, U.S. Army

My name is Riva Gijanto-Burris. I am the surviving spouse of Sergeant First Class Jeremy Burris, who served our nation honorably for eighteen years. We have two children, who were eight and ten years old when they lost their father.

Like many military families, our lives were defined by sacrifice long before loss. Frequent PCS moves meant we gave up stability, careers, proximity to family, and the ability to establish long-term roots. These sacrifices were not temporary—they shaped every aspect of our lives in service to this country.

Throughout my husband's military career, I was also his primary caregiver as he battled the invisible wounds of service to Iraq and Afghanistan, including PTSD and traumatic brain injury. When he struggled, it was me who carried the weight at home—supporting him through sleepless nights, emotional distress, and the lasting effects of his service. Military spouses do not receive training for this role, yet we become caregivers, advocates, and the foundation that allows our service members to continue their mission.

After his passing, my children and I faced the reality that many military families do—we did not own a home due to the demands of military life. A charitable organization began assisting us in February 2024, and it was not until March 2025 that we were able to move into a permanent home in Cecil County. We chose to make Maryland our permanent residence because of its strong military community, support, and opportunities to continue serving alongside those who understand our sacrifice.

During this time, I was also navigating a nearly three-year probate litigation battle over an outdated will written before our marriage and before our children were born—a process that has cost my family nearly \$160,000 because of abuse of power and greed where laws in place to protect my family were repeatedly challenged and therefore has painfully prolonged litigation. Like many surviving spouses, I was not in a position to immediately purchase a home within a strict timeframe while managing grief, legal hardship, and financial instability.

Maryland's current requirement that surviving spouses purchase and occupy a home within two years of a service member's death does not reflect the realities of military life or loss. It unintentionally excludes families who have sacrificed the most—those who, due to service, never had the opportunity to establish homeownership before tragedy.

House Bill 0842 addresses this gap. It provides fairness. It acknowledges that military families serve together, sacrifice together, and should be supported together.

This bill is not just about my family. It is about ensuring that no surviving military spouse or child is denied relief because their service required them to live a life without stability.

For eighteen years, our family lived in service to this nation—I am asking that Maryland honor not only his sacrifice, but the life our children and I continue to carry forward without him.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Riva Gijanto-Burris