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NFDA Applauds Senate Passage of Legislation Ensuring Dignified Burials for Veterans

Brookfield, Wis. – Yesterday, the U.S. Senate passed [“The Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act” \(S. 141\)](#), a comprehensive omnibus package of veterans legislation. Among its significant provisions, the bill includes a crucial update to veterans’ burial benefits that extends the allowance to veterans who die from a non-service-connected disability at home while receiving hospice care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Following the House of Representatives’ passage of this legislation last month ([H.R. 8371](#)), the bill now heads to President Joe Biden for his signature. The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) is a steadfast advocate for enhancing veterans’ funeral and burial benefits, with a full-time lobbyist in Washington, D.C., who played a pivotal role in supporting this legislation through expert advice and testimony.

“On behalf of NFDA’s 20,000 members, I want to express our deep gratitude to Congress for passing this essential legislation,” said NFDA President Christopher P. Robinson, CFSP, CCO. “We especially appreciate the dedication of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs for their tireless work to ensure our nation’s veterans are honored with a dignified funeral and burial, regardless of where they take their final breath.”

The provision to extend burial benefits to veterans who die at home while under hospice care is outlined in Section 301 of S. 141 and is rooted in the earlier House bill known as “Gerald’s Law.” Named in honor of veteran Gerald “Jerry” Elliott, this measure closes a gap in current policy that denies terminally ill veterans their VA burial allowance if they pass away outside a VA facility while under VA-furnished hospice care.

On November 13, NFDA Lobbyist Lesley Witter, MPA, CAE, provided testimony before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs in support of “Gerald’s Law” and nearly 20 other provisions in “The Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act.”

During her testimony, Witter stated: “NFDA supports the ‘Veterans’ Burial Improvement Act of 2024,’ particularly its provisions making certain burial benefits permanent for spouses and children of armed forces members who die while on active duty. We also endorse the provision enabling the Secretary to cover additional costs for transporting a veteran from the place of death to a designated cemetery, exceeding the standard transportation allowance. These legislative initiatives are crucial steps toward ensuring that our veterans and their families receive the utmost respect and recognition for their sacrifices to our nation. NFDA is proud to support these efforts and remains committed to advocating for the dignified treatment of our nation’s heroes.”

Following her testimony before the House, Witter noted, “It was an honor to testify before Congress on behalf of this vital legislation. This bill represents a significant step toward ensuring that all veterans, no matter where they die, receive the respect, recognition and benefits they have earned through their service.”

NFDA has a long-standing tradition of advocating for policies that honor the service and sacrifice of America's veterans. As the world's largest and most trusted funeral service association, NFDA's commitment to veterans and their families is founded on deep respect for their service and a belief that every veteran deserves dignified recognition in death.

Throughout its history, NFDA has supported key legislation to ensure equitable funeral and burial benefits for all veterans, regardless of circumstances. This includes the "Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020," which established equal burial benefits for all non-service-connected deaths.

NFDA's advocacy success is built on strong relationships with lawmakers, the VA, and veterans' organizations. Through congressional testimony, direct outreach to policymakers and mobilizing funeral directors across the country, NFDA ensures that the voices of funeral directors, veterans and their families are heard.

About NFDA

NFDA is the world's leading and largest funeral service association, serving 20,000 individual members who represent nearly 11,000 funeral homes in the United States and 49 countries around the world. NFDA is the trusted leader, beacon for ethics and the strongest advocate for the profession. NFDA is the association of choice because it offers funeral professionals comprehensive educational resources, tools to manage successful businesses, guidance to become pillars in their communities and the expertise to foster future generations of funeral professionals. NFDA is headquartered in Brookfield, Wis., and has an office in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit NFDA.org.

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