



WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT



WWP WARRIOR DANIELLE GREEN SPEAKS AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON, DC FOR THE MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ NEWSLETTER | SUMMER 2024 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

OPERATION ADVOCACY

Welcome to the Summer 2024 issue of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) Advocacy News. WWP's advocacy efforts connect you and your fellow warriors with your elected officials, providing you a voice in our nation's capital and empowering you to discuss the issues that matter most to the post-9/11 veteran community.

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LETTER FROM OUR VP

Finding Purpose Through Advocacy

On July 28, 2004, my life changed forever. While serving as a Navy Corpsman with a Marine Corps sniper team in Al-Karmah, Iraq, I was severely injured during my third combat tour. Our forward operating base (FOB) was attacked just as we were preparing for another mission. A rocket struck our FOB, instantly severing my left arm and injuring the Marine behind me.

Before that day, I had clear career goals: I wanted to advance to the special operations community, become an 18 Delta medic (Special Operations Combat Medic), and after a successful career in the military, transition to a paramedic firefighter. Would my plan have worked out exactly like I imagined it? Probably not — no plan does. But I definitely didn't expect this. In an instant, those plans exploded — literally.

Faced with an uncertain future, I sought a new purpose. I discovered adaptive sports, which introduced me to a broader community of individuals with disabilities. This newfound involvement led me to advocacy. Initially, I advocated for myself — securing the equipment I needed and accessing earned benefits. But soon, my focus expanded to supporting all wounded warriors and individuals with disabilities. Advocacy became a new mission, giving me a sense of purpose akin to my previous service.

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“Your voice matters, and together, we can make a real difference in the lives of those who have served. Join us in this vital mission! Your involvement could be the key to achieving lasting change for our fellow brothers and sisters — and discovering a new purpose and identity for yourself.”

— **JOSE RAMOS,**
WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
VP, GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS



WWP VICE PRESIDENT JOSE RAMOS SPEAKS AT THE ELIZABETH DOLE HEALTHCARE ACT PRESS CONFERENCE.

Being an advocate is something anyone can do: veterans, caregivers, family members, and supporters. One can advocate in different ways: writing letters, making phone calls, meeting with your elected officials, or just educating others on an issue that matters to you. To be successful, though, there are a few things you should know.

Through my journey, I've learned several key lessons about advocacy, especially when advocating on veterans' issues:

- 1. The importance of bipartisanship:** Advocacy often intersects with politics. Veterans' issues, like those addressed by the Major Richard Star Act or the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, require broad bipartisan support to advance. Building relationships across the political spectrum is crucial, ensuring veteran issues receive universal backing from all members of Congress.
- 2. Casting a wide net:** Effective advocacy involves engaging with all legislators. Some may have a natural connection to veterans' issues, while others need additional outreach and education.
- 3. Keeping politics impersonal:** Not all legislators will prioritize veterans' issues equally. Maintaining strong relationships and understanding the diverse pressures they face is essential for progress.
- 4. Setting aside personal differences:** Grassroots advocacy should focus on shared goals rather than personal political preferences. Uniting in support of veterans, regardless of individual beliefs, maximizes impact and effectiveness.

The Operation Advocacy Newsletter aims to keep you informed about our work on Capitol Hill and how the issues debated in Congress impact those who served and their families. It also creates an opportunity for you to get involved and become an advocate yourself.

A little over 20 years ago, I began to learn what it means to be an advocate and how it can drive meaningful change and transform lives, including my own. By embracing bipartisanship and focusing on shared goals, you can amplify your impact and help ensure that all veterans receive the support they deserve.

We encourage you to take the next step and become an advocate yourself. Read the newsletter, respond to our calls to action, email your members of Congress, and meet with them and their staff locally.

Your voice matters, and together, we can make a real difference in the lives of those who have served. Join us in this vital mission! Your involvement could be the key to achieving lasting change for our fellow brothers and sisters — and discovering a new purpose and identity for yourself.

To honor and empower,



JOSE RAMOS,
WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
VP, GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS



LEGISLATIVE/PROGRAM UPDATES

Major Richard Star Act: WWP Fights Injustice Against Veterans

JOINED BY OTHER VSOS, WWP WARRIORS SHARE THEIR PERSONAL STORIES DURING THE PRESS CONFERENCE.

Developments are happening quickly with the Major Richard Star Act and other WWP legislative priorities. For the latest legislative updates, follow WWP Government and Community Relations on X at @WWP_DC and through our [Operation Advocacy grassroots advocacy webpage](#).

WWP and other leading veterans service organizations (VSOs) are currently pushing the Senate to include the Major Richard Star Act as an amendment in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT), the chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID) were set to introduce the amendment, and WWP is calling on Senators to cosponsor the amendment. A large number of cosponsors will demonstrate the overall strength for the bill and help push it to be approved.

Overview of the Legislation

When Service members retire from the military, they are entitled to both retirement pay from the Department of Defense (DoD) and disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) if they were injured while in service. Unfortunately, only military retirees with at least 20 years of service and a disability rating of at least 50 percent are able to collect both benefits at the same

time. For all other retirees, current law requires a dollar-for-dollar offset of these two benefits, meaning they have to forfeit a portion of the benefits they earned in service.

Under the Major Richard Star Act, former Service members who were medically retired from the military with less than 20 years of service (Chapter 61 retirees) AND are eligible for Combat-Related Special Compensation would no longer have their benefits reduced by the offset. This includes those who were retired for injuries sustained in combat and combat-related training.

Press Conference

In July, WWP held a press conference on Capitol Hill with Sen. Tester, leading VSOs, and WWP warriors Mike Owens (U.S. Marine Corps, Texas), Danielle Green (U.S. Army, Florida), Alex Nicoll (U.S. Marine Corps, Kentucky), and Patrick Nugent (U.S. Marine Corps, New York), who shared their stories of service and sacrifice.

MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT (CONT.)

“The vehicle I was manning hit the portion of a road damaged by an IED, crashed, and ended up rolling over on me,” said Mike Owens during the press conference. “I lost an arm, and my two legs were crushed. For the 53,000 veterans like me who would be impacted by the Major Richard Star Act — we’re not asking for anything new. We’re not asking for something that we didn’t already fight and sacrifice immensely to earn. We earned our full retirement. That’s all we’re asking for.”

Army veteran Danielle Green, who lost her left arm in Baghdad, advocates tirelessly for her fellow veterans. “This bill would provide crucial financial support to veterans who face significant challenges transitioning to civilian life due to their combat injuries.”

Alex Nicoll, a Marine Corps veteran from Kentucky, lost his left leg in Iraq. “I didn’t join the military for the benefits or to get rich. I wanted to be a hero, kick down doors, and take down bad guys. I didn’t worry about benefits, but even then, I knew that America had promised to take care of its veterans,” said Alex.

“Our country has a responsibility not only to veterans like me but the new generation of veterans coming in. We need to show them that if something does happen to them in the line of duty, our country will be there to support them and treat them fairly”

— ALEX NICOLL

WOUNDED WARRIOR

Patrick Nugent was medically retired from the Marine Corps and now lives in New York City.

“On July 12, 2017, during a nighttime training mission, a single bullet paralyzed my right leg, abruptly ending my military career. I wanted to be a lifetime Marine. In search of a new path, I refused to give up and found a new career. There are thousands of veterans with stories like mine, and Congress must pass this bill to honor their sacrifices and resilience,” said Patrick.

“Generation after generation, Americans have stepped up and served their country with a solemn promise: that if they came home changed by their service, we would take care of them,” said Chairman Tester. “But for combat-injured veterans who were forced to retire before completing 20 years of service, their government is currently failing to deliver on that promise. Congress has the opportunity to



WWP WARRIOR ALEX NICOLL SPEAKS ABOUT HIS SERVICE-RELATED INJURIES.

do the right thing for these veterans and their families by setting up a vote to adopt the Major Richard Star Act as an amendment to the NDAA to finally fix this unfair policy and provide medically retired combat veterans their full military benefits. I urge each and every one of my colleagues to put veterans first and party politics last to get this bill included in the NDAA.”

Representatives from numerous VSOs attended, and leaders from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Military Officers Association of America, The Military Coalition, and the Reserve Organization of America spoke during the press conference. WWP wishes to thank the Reserve Organization of America for graciously hosting the event.

Social Media and Email Campaign

WWP has activated a social media campaign featuring images of WWP warriors who would be affected by the Major Richard Star Act. Follow us at @WWP_DC on X to share these images and help spread the message about passing the Major Richard Star Act.

WWP also has a grassroots email campaign about the bill. [Send pre-filled letters](#) to your two U.S. Senators, encouraging them to support the bill as an amendment to the NDAA. You are strongly encouraged to personalize your message with your own stories or those of veterans you know to make an even greater impact. Your voice does make a difference!



SENATOR ELIZABETH DOLE SPEAKS AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE URGING CONGRESS TO PASS THE DOLE BILL WITH SECTION 105.

LEGISLATIVE/PROGRAM UPDATES

Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veteran Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (H.R.8371)

After months of hearings, discussions, and negotiations, key veteran leaders in Congress introduced H.R. 8371, the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (Dole Act).

All four key Congressional leaders on veterans' issues — House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL-12) and Ranking Member Mark Takano (D-CA-39), along with Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) and Ranking Member Jerry Moran (R-KS) — were all heavily involved in the development of the legislation, which includes numerous bipartisan and bicameral proposals to reform and improve the delivery of VA health care, benefits, and services for caregivers and their survivors.

The Dole Act, shaped by legislators and key stakeholders like WWP, is an omnibus bill, meaning it contains a series

of proposals focused on veterans addressing a wide range of issues. Much of the bill's content comes from previously introduced bills like the Veteran Care Improvement Act (H.R.3520), introduced by Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA-1), which aims to improve and expand VA health services and incentivize partnerships between VA and community providers, and the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act (H.R.542), introduced by Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA-26) in the House and Senators Jerry Moran (R-KS), Jon Tester (D-MT), and Maggie Hassan (D-NH) in the Senate, which would expand community-based services for aging veterans as well as improve VA support for veterans and caregivers of all ages.

LEGISLATIVE/PROGRAM UPDATES

Elizabeth Dole Act (CONT.)



(SECOND ROW LEFT TO RIGHT): THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHANIN NUNTAVONG, NATIONAL COALITION FOR HOMELESS VETERANS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER KATHRYN MONET, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS (TAPS) BONNIE CARROL, WWP VICE PRESIDENT GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS JOSE RAMOS, DISABLED VETERANS OF AMERICA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS EDWARD R. “RANDY” REESE, MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN SENIOR DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS RENÉ CAMPOS, PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA CEO, NATIONAL OFFICE, CARL BLAKE,

(FIRST ROW LEFT TO RIGHT): ELIZABETH DOLE FOUNDATION FOUNDER SENATOR ELIZABETH DOLE, ELIZABETH DOLE FOUNDATION SENIOR POLICY ADVISER MEREDITH BECK, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS DIRECTOR NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE PAT MURRAY

“We have made tremendous progress in removing the stigma around talking about mental health, but it doesn’t matter if we can’t deliver services to address mental health to our veterans at risk”

— **JOSE RAMOS**
WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
VP, GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Among its provisions, the bill provides new avenues to mental health treatment, requires VA to improve how they collect data and report on veteran suicide, and requires VA to pay or reimburse a veteran for the cost of transportation via ambulance from a covered location to a facility that can meet the veteran’s needs — whether it be at a VA facility, a non-VA provider, or the nearest hospital.

The Dole Act expands access to home- and community-based services for the elderly and most severely disabled veterans to help ensure they can receive in-home care rather than at a nursing home. Most importantly, the act would raise the cap on the costs of non-institutional care from 65% of what could be spent at a nursing home to 100%, offering financial relief to families.

This bill includes over 90 provisions impacting caregivers, women veterans, student veterans, aspiring professionals, and National Guard and Reservists. For a more detailed look into the bill and its key sections related to mental health, caregivers, assisted living, employment, and women veterans, among many others, visit the [WWP Newsroom](#).

WWP Priority: Section 105 and Residential Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs

While WWP supports many of the provisions in the bill, our key priority relates to VA’s Residential Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs (RRTPs). These programs provide the most intensive level of care to veterans with chronic problems related to post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, or both.

However, RRTPs are NOT currently subject to the VA MISSION Act, which provides veterans with the statutory right to receive care in the community. This means that when a veteran seeks RRTP care, they could (and often do) wait weeks to receive care.

Section 105 of the Dole Act addresses this problem by creating an access standard for RRTPs that includes the following process:

- ★ VA screens patients within 48 hours, and
- ★ If eligible and appropriate, admits that veteran to an RRTP program within 48 hours of the decision.

If that care cannot be provided at a VA within the state, VA must offer the veteran RRTP care at another VA facility or at a community care network provider (which must be able to admit the veteran within 48 hours).

LEGISLATIVE/PROGRAM UPDATES



Additionally, Section 105 requires VA to develop an access standard within one year of the bill's enactment for all other veterans who do not fall under the priority admissions.

Bill Status

Despite the Dole Act receiving strong support from all major veteran service organizations (VSOs) and military support organizations (MSOs) as well as the Chairman and Ranking Members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and the Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, it has fallen victim to politics, misinformation, and mischaracterization of its provisions. Some claim that the bill is an attempt to privatize VA, while others claim it doesn't go far enough or that it rolls back the MISSION Act.

WWP's position is that neither claim is accurate, and we believe the current policy language represents a good compromise.

Press Conference

To help push the bill beyond politics and see its passage on Capitol Hill, a coalition of VSOs, including WWP, held a press conference in June featuring the bill's namesake, Sen. Elizabeth Dole. WWP Vice President of Government and Community Relations Jose Ramos, joined by leaders from the Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of

Elizabeth Dole Act (CONT.)

Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, spoke on behalf of WWP and highlighted the importance of RRTPs.

"We have made tremendous progress in removing the stigma around talking about mental health, but it doesn't matter if we can't deliver services to address mental health to our veterans at risk," said Jose. "Weeks, or even months, is too long for a warrior to wait. We are asking for 96 hours. Four days. That's the very least we can do for veterans who are at risk. They have earned this standard of care. I call on all of Congress to pass the Dole Act now."

With several military news outlets attending the press conference, the bill has received increased attention. WWP is working closely with key members of Congress to help finalize sections of the bill.

Grassroots Advocacy

WWP has set up a [campaign](#) for warriors to email their members of Congress and urge them to pass the **Dole Act** with Section 105. Warriors can read more about the bill and review, personalize, and send email templates to their Representatives.

"Whether it's supporting caregivers and in-home care delivery, making it easier for rural veterans to access care, or supporting RRTPs, the Dole Act is one of our key legislative priorities, along with the Major Richard Star Act," said WWP Director of Government Relations Brian Dempsey.

“Every warrior will be affected in some way by this bill, so we encourage all warriors to get involved and send their messages to Congress now.”

— **BRIAN DEMPSEY**

WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

LEGISLATIVE/PROGRAM UPDATES

FAA Reauthorization Bill Signed Into Law, Improving Air Travel Access for Veterans with Disabilities

THE FAA REAUTHORIZATION BILL WILL MAKE IT EASIER FOR WOUNDED WARRIORS TO FLY FOR BUSINESS, MEDICAL CARE OR TO PARTICIPATE IN WWP PROGRAMS.

On May 16, 2024, President Biden signed H.R. 3935, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, into law.

This bipartisan bill provides a five-year authorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the government agency within the Department of Transportation (DOT) responsible for regulating U.S. air travel, including establishing safety standards and maintaining and operating air traffic control systems. Additionally, the bill makes investments in airport infrastructure and the aviation workforce, enhances the travel experience for commercial airline passengers, and, most importantly, improves accessibility for passengers with disabilities.

★ BACKGROUND

Air travel has historically presented significant challenges for passengers with disabilities, especially those who use wheelchairs. Since commercial planes are not designed to allow passengers to remain in their wheelchairs while

flying, wheelchairs must often be checked like luggage and transported in the cargo area of the plane. Like luggage, wheelchairs can then be damaged or lost in transit, severely limiting the mobility and independence of the passenger at their destination.

According to the [Air Travel Consumer Report](#), hundreds of wheelchairs, many of which are customized and expensive, are mishandled by airlines each month. Once the passenger surrenders their wheelchair, they are transferred to a narrow aisle chair and lifted into their seat by airline employees or contractors. These individuals often lack the proper training to safely provide this assistance, which can result in the passenger being injured. These situations often create a frustrating and potentially unsafe travel experience for all wheelchair users, including disabled veterans, which in turn can create significant barriers for wounded warriors who may wish to fly for business, recreation, or medical care, or to participate in WWP programs like Adaptive Sports.

LEGISLATIVE/PROGRAM UPDATES

FAA Reauthorization Bill (CONT.)



WOUNDED WARRIOR
DREW CARPENTER

“We hear too many stories from warriors with disabilities – especially those who use wheelchairs – about the challenges of air travel. That is why we were proud to support the passage of the FAA Reauthorization Act, which will help ensure veterans are treated with the respect they’ve earned when they fly.”

— **BRIAN DEMPSEY**
WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

★ **WHAT THE BILL DOES**

The FAA Reauthorization Act contains many provisions supported by WWP that will improve air travel access for people with disabilities, including disabled veterans, in the coming months and years.

Provisions include the following:

Training:

- ★ DOT will establish new training standards within one year for airline personnel and contractors who assist wheelchair users during boarding and deplaning. These standards will include instructions on how to properly transfer passengers to and from their wheelchair and their seats on the plane. Training will also include how to effectively communicate with and take instructions from the passenger. This mandatory training will create a safer and more dignified experience for wheelchair users.
- ★ Also, within one year, DOT will establish new training standards for airline personnel and contractors who handle and stow wheelchairs and scooters. These standards will include how to properly load, secure, and unload manual and power wheelchairs on each type of aircraft operated by the airline. This will help ensure that fewer wheelchairs are damaged in transit.

Refunds: Requiring airlines to refund passengers who purchase a ticket but cannot travel because their wheelchairs will not fit in the cargo hold.

Seating: Within two years, DOT will be required to issue new regulations on seating accommodations for passengers with disabilities that must consider those who may require bulkhead seating for extra space or may need to be seated with a caregiver during a flight.

In-Cabin Wheelchair Travel: DOT will be required to study the technical and economic feasibility of implementing airplane seating arrangements that would allow passengers to remain in their personal wheelchairs during flights.

Service Animals: Establishing a five-year Known Service Animal pilot program that will create a streamlined pre-approval process for service animal users.

To learn about additional provisions related to airport kiosks, service desks, in-flight entertainment, and more, a section-by-section summary of the FAA Reauthorization Act can be found [here](#). Accessibility provisions are found in Title V, Subtitle B.

VA UPDATES

★ VETERANS GROUP LIFE INSURANCE

When you leave the military, you can apply for Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) within one year and 120 days from your discharge for up to the amount of coverage you had through Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI).

You may be eligible for VGLI if you meet at least one of the following requirements:

- ★ Had part-time SGLI as a member of the National Guard or Reserve and suffered an injury or disability (damage to your body or mind that makes it hard for you to do everyday tasks, including meaningful work) while on duty — including direct traveling to and from duty — that disqualified you for standard premium insurance rates.
- ★ Had SGLI while you were in the military, and you're within one year and 120 days of being released from an active-duty period of 31 or more days.
- ★ You are within one year and 120 days of retiring or being released from the Ready Reserve or National Guard.
- ★ You are within one year and 120 days of assignment to the Individual Ready Reserve of a branch of service or to the Inactive National Guard. This includes members of the United States Public Health Service Inactive Reserve Corps.
- ★ You are within one year and 120 days of being put on the Temporary Disability Retirement List.

You can receive between \$10,000 and \$500,000 in term life insurance benefits. The amount you'll receive will be based on how much SGLI coverage you had when you left the military. You can also increase your coverage by \$25,000 every five years — up to \$500,000 — until you're 60 years old.

To learn more, including how to apply, visit the [VGLI website](#).

★ TRAUMATIC INJURY PROTECTION

Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection (TSGLI) benefits were expanded in April 2023. This expansion provides additional TSGLI benefits for limb reconstruction surgeries, inpatient hospital care at critical care facilities, rehabilitation facilities, and skilled nursing facilities, and the care required when you transition from an inpatient facility to living at home. Under TSGLI's coverage, you may receive \$25,000 to \$100,000 in short-term financial support.

You may be eligible for TSGLI if you were insured by SGLI when you experienced a traumatic injury and if you meet ALL of these requirements:

- ★ Have a scheduled loss that is a direct result of the traumatic injury.
- ★ Suffered the traumatic injury before midnight on the day that you left the military.
- ★ Suffered a scheduled loss within two years (730 days) of the traumatic injury.
- ★ Survived for a period of not less than seven full days from the date of the traumatic injury (the seven-day period begins on the date and time of the traumatic injury and ends 168 full hours later).
- ★ Were an active-duty military member, a Reservist, or a National Guard member on funeral-honors duty or on one-day muster duty.

While some injuries are excluded from TSGLI coverage, the expansion of TSGLI benefits means that if you have previously submitted a claim that was denied, you can file a new claim. For more information on these expanded TSGLI benefits, eligibility, and exclusions, visit the [TSGLI website](#).

VA UPDATES (CONT.)

★ **BURIAL BENEFITS**

VA is committed to honoring your service and the sacrifice you have given to the country. Several VA burial benefits are available to ensure that veterans receive the recognition and respect owed to them.

VA NATIONAL CEMETERY

Veterans, Service members, spouses, and dependents may be eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery if they meet one of these requirements:

The person qualifying for burial benefits is:

- ★ A veteran who didn't receive a dishonorable discharge.
- ★ A Service member who died while on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty for training.
- ★ The spouse or surviving spouse of a veteran (even if they remarried after the veteran's death).
- ★ The minor child of a veteran (even if the veteran died first) or, in some cases, the unmarried adult dependent child of a veteran.

If you are eligible and wish to be buried in a VA national cemetery, the burial benefit provides for:

- ★ The gravesite
- ★ The grave liner (vault)
- ★ Opening and closing of the grave
- ★ Government headstone, marker, or niche cover
- ★ Burial flag
- ★ Presidential Memorial Certificate
- ★ Military honors

For more information on burial benefits at a VA national cemetery, visit the [National Cemetery Administration's website](#).

PRIVATE CEMETERY

If you wish to be buried in a private cemetery, the following benefits are available (there are no spouse or dependent burial benefits included):

- ★ Headstone or marker
- ★ Medallion
- ★ Burial flag
- ★ Presidential Memorial Certificate

Learn more about private cemetery burials.

In addition to these burial benefits, VA also provides certain burial allowances to help cover burial, funeral, and transportation costs. If eligible, the individuals responsible for these costs may receive burial allowances if they are paying for the burial and funeral costs and not receiving reimbursement benefits from any other organization, such as a government agency or the veteran's employer.

If a veteran's death was a result of a service-related injury or condition, burial allowances are as follows:

- ★ If the veteran died on or after September 11, 2001: \$2,000
- ★ If the veteran died before September 11, 2001: \$1,500
- ★ If the veteran is buried in a VA national cemetery, you may be reimbursed for some or all the costs of moving the veteran's remains.

If the veteran's death was not service-connected, VA will pay a \$948 burial allowance and \$948 for the plot. This same burial allowance is provided if the veteran was hospitalized by VA at the time of their death.

It is important to have all the necessary documents ready when navigating this difficult process. The documents needed will be a copy of the veteran's discharge papers (DD-214 or equivalent), a copy of the death certificate, and any applicable receipts for expenses related to the burial and funeral. More information on burial allowances and how to apply can be found [here](#).

OPERATION ADVOCACY EFFORTS

WWP INTERVIEW: Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program

WWP helped lead an effort on the state level to restore cuts made to the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP).

VMSDEP offers eight semesters of free tuition at public universities in Virginia for children of veterans who are at least 90 percent permanently disabled, killed in action, or taken prisoner. The program has been a lifeline for many who would otherwise be unable to attend college.

However, the recent budget bill for FY 2025 and 2026 signed by Governor Glenn Youngkin altered the eligibility requirements for this program, forcing participants to seek out other forms of financial aid first and only use the VMSDEP program for undergraduate degrees. Students would potentially have to pay out of pocket and only then apply for a tuition waiver. Virginia military families were especially angry because the changes occurred on May 13, two days before they had to meet the May 15 college enrollment date deadline.

WWP Response

WWP's Grassroots team put together information and an email campaign for Virginia wounded warriors to contact their state Senators about the situation. WWP also signed on to a joint letter from a coalition of VSOs, led by Friends

of VMSDEP, to the Virginia Assembly. Fortunately, once the word began getting out, Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin quickly called on the assembly to reverse the changes.

WWP was led on the local level by Warrior Advocate Leader (WAL) Brent Reiffer. Brent spoke at a public comment session of the Preserving the VMSDEP Task Force and met with numerous state officials, including Governor Youngkin, to ensure the program changes were repealed (see article below about his thoughts on the campaign and how his training as a WAL helped his efforts).

Both the Virginia House of Delegates and the Senate passed legislation, subsequently signed by the Governor, that not only repeals the changes but also includes an additional \$90 million in funding over the next two years to offset the cost of the VMSDEP program to the state's public colleges and universities.

Meanwhile, the program is being reviewed and analyzed by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, Virginia's nonpartisan legislative research agency, with a report to be issued on how the state can keep the program working and fully funded.

OPERATION ADVOCACY EFFORTS

WWP Interview (CONT.)

Q&A WITH WAL BRENT REIFFER

Q How did you first hear about the VSMDEP issue?

I was approached by a fellow veteran at the Virginia Women Veterans commemoration at the Virginia War Memorial on March 21. She saw my WWP lapel pin and started asking how WWP could help. She pressed me to act. I did some research and then reached out to WWP Grassroots Regional Director Coleman Brooks to see how the team engages in state-level matters.

Q How did WWP support you during the campaign?

It was great. At first, everyone was trying to get their arms around what was happening. Then, as the original bill with the changes was approved, WWP reached back out to me, and we stayed synced up on messaging, social media awareness, and advocacy efforts throughout the process. I found it especially helpful to communicate with WWP Vice President of Government and Community Relations Jose Ramos during times of uncertainty. His mentorship was greatly appreciated.

Q What was it like to speak at the Preserving the VMSDEP Task Force during the public comment period?

I have to say, it was a bit emotional. Not only was I flabbergasted that the disabled veteran, first responder, and surviving family member communities were being targeted, but I was equally upset about how the changes to the promised benefit transpired.

“...it is essential to remain bipartisan in all advocacy efforts”

— BRENT REIFFER
WWP WARRIOR ADVOCATE LEADER



Q How did you prepare your comments?

I reached out to WWP to determine what the team was comfortable with me saying. I wanted to balance representing WWP as an organization while conveying my personal thoughts on the matter. I traded a few emails and provided a few drafts of my comments before settling on what I was going to say in the three minutes I was allotted.

Q What were you personally doing to push the issue forward?

I made MANY emails and phone calls not only to my state-level Senator and delegate, but also to those who were opposed to the repeal and those who were strong supporters. I also conducted a couple of interviews with local media representatives and engaged face-to-face with elected officials at the Capitol and General Assembly buildings. The Friends of VMSDEP group had periodic virtual meetings to keep the advocates focused and informed of changes in proposed bill language, positions of key elected officials, and discussion of various advocacy methods. These meetings were supported by a very active Facebook group with members who constantly provided updates on all things related to our efforts. Finally, I coordinated with group leaders and tried to leverage WWP’s various platforms to raise awareness of the issue and facilitate a call to action for Virginia WWP warriors.

OPERATION ADVOCACY EFFORTS

WWP Interview (CONT.)

Q What was your experience like going to the State Capitol to push for the legislation?

Actually, quite frustrating. While the process is always exciting, my experience soon changed to bewilderment and anger when listening to elected officials' arguments and behavior who either were uninformed or apathetic to the impact of the changes made to VMSDEP. I definitely lost my naivete associated with the political process. It was eye-opening to learn how backroom deals were made and just how much power and ego are involved.

Q Do you feel your WWP WAL training was helpful in any way during your work on the issue?

Definitely. First, I was completely comfortable interacting with the elected officials and felt I was able to convey my main talking points succinctly. Second, I had the confidence to approach the Governor, the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services, and others to ask difficult questions. Lastly, I was familiar with the WWP team and was comfortable reaching out and asking for help/guidance.

Q What would you tell other WALs if an issue arises in their states?

The key is to be aware of the issues and be ready to take action. While you can do a lot as a WAL, it is essential to form a coalition of other grassroots advocates who can stand united with one voice and a consistent message. This voice must remain tactful, as lashing out with insults or other gestures that might feel good at the moment but will not help the group's efforts. Lastly, I would say it is essential to remain bipartisan in all advocacy efforts, as the elected officials don't quite know how to handle a united group that cannot be fractured.

“The key is to be aware of the issues and be ready to take action. While you can do a lot as a WAL, it is essential to form a coalition of other grassroots advocates who can stand united with one voice and a consistent message.”

— BRENT REIFFER
WWP WARRIOR ADVOCATE LEADER



WWP WAL BRENT REIFFER HELPED LEAD LOCAL ADVOCACY EFFORTS MEETING WITH STATE OFFICIALS INCLUDING VIRGINIA STATE DELEGATE MARK EARLY, JR.



OPERATION ADVOCACY EFFORTS

NEW WWP WALS MEET FOR TRAINING IN SAN ANTONIO, TX.
 FRONT ROW, PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: JAMES RICHARD (CT), PERRY COOKE (KY), NICOLE LYON (NH), LISA OLIVAS (OK), TINA WAGGENER (MT), JESSICA ROZA (AZ), ADONICA HEARD (AL), CAROL BAILLIE (VA) (KNEELING) AND NORM, HER SERVICE DOG, CASSANDRA JOHNSON (AZ), MIKA SYDRA (CA)
 BACK ROW, PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: NICOLE EAST (TX), CLARK SABO (OH), LANI KELP (WA), CHRISTOPHER MCGRATH (CA), JASON HALVERSON (MN), AARON TILLEY (UT), DAVID SELLA (NC), ROBERT CAMPAGNONE (RI), ERIC DONOHO (IN)

WELCOME NEW WARRIOR ADVOCATE LEADERS

Warrior Advocate Leaders (WALs) are volunteers who don't just support WWP's legislative efforts but help lead them at the local level. We'd like to congratulate and welcome the next group of WALs!

FRONT ROW, L-R:

- ★ James Richard (CT),
- ★ Perry Cooke (KY),
- ★ Nicole Lyon (NH),
- ★ Lisa Olivas (OK),
- ★ Tina Waggener (MT),
- ★ Jessica Roza (AZ),
- ★ Adonica Heard (AL),
- ★ Carol Baillie (VA),
- ★ Cassandra Johnson (AZ),
- ★ Mika Sydra (CA)

BACK ROW, L-R:

- ★ Nicole East (TX),
- ★ Clark Sabo (OH),
- ★ Lani Kelp (WA),
- ★ Christopher McGrath (CA),
- ★ Jason Halverson (MN),
- ★ Aaron Tilley (UT),
- ★ David Sella (NC),
- ★ Robert Campagnone (RI),
- ★ Eric Donoho (IN)

OUR TEAM

- ★ Jose Ramos, Vice President, Government and Community Relations
- ★ Michael Nilsen, Communications Director, Government and Community Relations
- ★ Shannon Walker, Administrative Assistant
- ★ Betteenia Turman, Communications Specialist

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

- ★ Brian Dempsey, Government Affairs Director
- ★ Lindsey Stanford, Government Affairs Specialist
- ★ Kirsten Laha-Walsh, Government Affairs Specialist
- ★ Anne Marie McLean, Senior Policy and Legislative Analyst
- ★ Kimberly Powell, Policy and Legislative Analyst
- ★ Aaron Locker, Policy and Legislative Analyst

GRASSROOTS AND CONSTITUENT AFFAIRS

- ★ Justin Beland, Grassroots and Constituent Affairs Director
- ★ Coleman Brooks, Regional Grassroots Director
- ★ Aleks Morosky, Regional Grassroots Director
- ★ Ben Watkins, Senior Constituent Affairs Specialist
- ★ Juan Valdez, Grassroots and Constituent Affairs Coordinator

SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

veterans.senate.gov

202.224.9126

X: [@SVACDems](https://twitter.com/SVACDems) ★ [@SVACGOP](https://twitter.com/SVACGOP)

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

veterans.house.gov

202.225.9756

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

armedservices.house.gov

202.225.4151

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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HOURS OF OPERATION

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