

April 20, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader
H-204 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S-230 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
S-221 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Time-sensitive request for the inclusion of the Burial Rights for America's Veterans' Efforts (BRAVE) Act (H.R. 497/S. 598) in the next coronavirus relief package.

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader Schumer:

Thank you for your distinguished leadership in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the largest funeral service association representing 11,000 funeral homes in the U.S. and around the world, we write to request inclusion of the Burial Rights for America's Veterans' Efforts (BRAVE) Act (S. 598) in the next coronavirus relief package. Given rising veteran fatalities from the COVID-19 outbreak, additional support is needed to ensure every veteran receives a dignified farewell.

Families suffering the loss of a veteran should not have to endure additional stress from financial hardship. Unfortunately, VA burial benefits have not been updated since 2001 and therefore have not kept pace with the rising costs of funerals. The BRAVE Act would amend Title 38 U.S.C. sections 2302 and 2307 to increase VA burial benefits for non-service connected deaths and authorize annual benefit increases based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) increases for all VA burial benefits. This bill enjoys strong bipartisan support as well as endorsements from VA and across the Veteran Service Organization community.

At the time of this letter, VA is tracking roughly 4,500 positive veteran cases of COVID-19 and nearly 300 veteran deaths. These numbers continue to rise by the day and are likely much higher given that not every veteran receives health care from the VA. Nearly 40 percent of veterans are seniors and many have underlying health conditions that place them at higher risk to serious complications from COVID-19 exposure.

Funeral directors are on the frontlines helping families through the loss of loved ones during this pandemic. We know firsthand how much updating this benefit would mean for veterans' families. We encourage you to promptly pass the BRAVE Act to ensure the brave men and women who have served our country in uniform receive the farewell they have earned. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Christine Pepper, MBA, CAE
Chief Executive Officer