



**About the National Funeral Directors Association**

Not only are NFDA members your constituents, they provide service, support and comfort to all of your constituents, your family and friends – and perhaps even you – during the most difficult times. Your support of these bills will positively impact your constituents during times of need.

NFDA is the world’s leading and largest funeral service association, serving more than 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.

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# Legislation to Aid Your Constituents

# H.R. 497 / S. 598: The BRAVE Act Burial Rights for America’s Veterans’ Efforts Act of 2019

Veterans should be treated equally based on their service, not the circumstances at their time of death, nor should they be penalized for where they die.

- **H.R. 497/ S. 598** is bipartisan legislation
- Designed to improve existing benefits for veterans meeting eligibility requirements
- Ensures that all non-service-connected veteran deaths are treated equally, regardless of where a veteran’s death occurs
- Maintains distinction between service-connected deaths and non-service-connected deaths
- Indexes all three benefits for inflation to alleviate the need for further adjustments from Congress.

To be eligible for this benefit, a veteran must have been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable and meet at least one of the following conditions:

- Died as a result of a service-connected disability
- Was receiving VA pension or compensation at the time of death
- Entitled to receive VA pension or compensation but took full military retirement or disability pay
- Died while hospitalized by the VA or while receiving care under VA contract at a non-VA facility
- Died while traveling under authorization and at VA expense to or from a specified place for purpose of examination, treatment or care
- Had original or reopened claim for VA compensation or pension pending at the time of death and would have been entitled to benefits from a date prior to the date of death
- Died while a patient at a VA-approved state facility.

The BRAVE Act makes the following modifications:

- A. Currently: \$2,000 for death from service-connected disability  
*Change: Index for inflation*
- B. Currently: \$796 for non-service-connected death in a VA Department facility  
*Change: None; currently indexed for inflation*
- C. Currently: \$300 for non-service-connected death or veterans with no next of kin, death not in a VA facility  
*Change: Raise to equal death in a VA facility and index for inflation.*

Based on the VA’s veteran population model, the estimated number of deaths in FY 2015 was 562,000. Of these, about 128,000 veterans were in receipt of VA disability compensation or pension benefits at the time of death. However, during FY 2015, the VA only issued benefit payments based on the deaths of approximately 91,700 veterans.

### Cost/Impact

In 2007 and 2008, VA’s Office of Policy and Planning (OPP) conducted a study to determine whether the burial program was achieving expected outcomes and to determine the program’s impact on veterans and families. OPP found that funeral costs had increased at a greater pace than the cost of other services since 1990. OPP noted that in 1973:

- The service-connected burial allowance covered 72 percent of a Veteran’s funeral and burial expenses.
- The non-service-connected allowance covered only 22 percent of a veteran’s funeral and burial expenses.

By 2007, the value of these benefits had decreased significantly:

- The service-connected burial allowance reimbursed only 23 percent of the cost of a veteran’s burial.
- The nonservice-connected burial allowance reimbursed only four percent of the cost of a veteran’s burial.
- The last increase in the service-connected burial allowance under section 2307 occurred December 27, 2001 through the enactment of Public Law 107-103, increasing the allowance from \$1,500 to \$2,000.
- The last increase in the non-service-connected burial allowance under section 2302 occurred October 1, 1978, through the enactment of Public Law 95-479, increasing the allowance from \$250 to \$300.

The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) reports on its website, [www.nfda.org](http://www.nfda.org), that the median cost of a funeral and burial was \$7,360 in 2017. The reported cost did not include the cost of a vault or cemetery plot or other miscellaneous cash advance charges, such as charges for flowers or obituaries. Further, NFDA reports that the median cost for an adult burial and funeral in the United States had increased from \$708 in 1960, to \$7,360 in 2017.

In testimony before the Senate Veterans Committee, the Department of Veterans Affairs endorsed the BRAVE Act. Paul R. Lawrence, Ph.D., under secretary for Benefits, Veterans Benefits Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, testified that the BRAVE Act “will allow [the] VA to offer a more valuable reimbursement for the costs of a veteran’s funeral during a very difficult and vulnerable period of transition for the survivor. Additionally, the proposal will tie the burial allowances to the current rate of inflation consistent with burial benefits under section 2303.”

In 2018, the VA estimated benefit costs to be: \$75.8 million over five years and \$259.2 million over ten years. This estimate is based on the rate of \$749 for basic burial allowance in 2018, this figure is indexed for inflation and currently stands at \$780. The cost will increase slightly with the updated rate of \$780.

### VSO Support

The BRAVE Act has been endorsed by several veterans’ service organizations during the Senate Veterans Committee hearing last year. In its testimony, The **American Legion** stated, “We support legislation increasing burial allowances and programs within the VA that will enhance, promote, restore or preserve benefits for veterans and their dependents.”

The **Veterans of Foreign Wars** testified, “The VFW supports this important bill, which would increase the funeral and burial benefit for eligible veterans.”

Other veterans’ service organizations endorsing the BRAVE Act include, the **Military Officers Association of America**, the **Vietnam Veterans of America**, the **Association of the United States Navy** and the **Disabled American Veterans**.