

10 May 2019 Legislative Report

With the start of the 116th Session of the United States Congress, new bills have been introduced that could impact survivor benefits:

1. Senate Bill 622 and House Resolution 553-Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act. These are the current SBP-DIC offset bills. The Senate bill was introduced by Senators Collins and Jones, as a bipartisan effort. The house bill was again introduced by Representative Joe Wilson.

These bills would end the offset that affects approximately 65,000 surviving spouses. It would allow more recent widows that currently have the SBP assigned to their children reselect and receive the SBP in the widow's name. This change would mean the widow would not be faced with SBP ending upon the youngest children turning 18.

Currently there are 57 cosponsors in the Senate and 216 in the House. These bills are also legislative priorities for MOAA, DAV, VFW, TAPS and the Military Coalition.

I have made several trips to the Hill for office visits. Most recently I accompanied 2 other SMW members on appointments in the offices of Senators Bennett and Gardner. We also spoke with Senators Inhofe and Klobuchar. We then dropped into several Representatives offices.

2. The DIC increase bill, S 1047 was introduced on April 5, Gold Star Wives Day, by Senator Tester. Senators Hirono and Blumenthal are also cosponsors.

I have not seen the text of this bill; however I have been told it provides for an increase in DIC that is not supposed to be affected by the offset.

There had been a Congressional hearing with the VA Committee regarding survivor benefits.

3. The third bill is Senate Bill 1911-SFC Brian Woods Gold Star and Military Survivors Act. This bill would allow widows to remarry and retain base access, SBP and DIC, transportation of remains to the hometown for services and also to

a national cemetery and child care assistance. There are currently 13 cosponsors for this bill.

There are Facebook groups for the first two items. Please consider calling your elected officials and ask them to cosponsor these bills.

I believe the priority should be in line with other Veteran Service Organizations-in that the SBP bill needs to be passed. A key point has been that this is a benefit for which many of the service member spouses paid premiums for their spouses to receive SBP in the event of their service-connected death. Some military members paid 30 years or more.

I also believe DIC needs to be increased. I would love to see both bills passed this year; however that is not likely. There are others also seeking benefit increases, such as the 40% disabled veterans. So getting benefits increased is a big struggle.

There is a momentum with the Facebook group and widows that have been working on the offset bill for many years. There has also been local and national media coverage. With over half of Congress currently cosponsoring the bill, it may be possible to see the offset end this year. It will take continued calls, emails, letters and office visits to members of Congress.

I hope to go to the Hill at least once a month, but I can not do this alone. I am willing to help anyone wanting to work on these legislative issues. I can be reached at 571-358-0169 and rosehorton@me.com.

Respectfully,

Rosalie Horton
Legislative Chairperson