



July 30, 2021

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chair, Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chair, Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Reed and Smith and Ranking Members Inhofe and Rogers:

The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of uniformed services and veterans' associations representing more than 5.5 million current and former servicemembers, their families, and survivors, writes to request you direct DoD, through the NDAA, to designate the next national cemetery that will afford full military honors and ensure continued honors for those currently eligible and for future servicemembers.

Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) will eventually reach capacity and a new location must be designated to continue operations. With current eligibility standards, ANC will not run out of room until 2050, leaving ample time to designate the next location near a military installation. Unfortunately, DoD has interpreted the 2019 NDAA as guidance to reduce eligibility, given cost and force structure planning constraints, and will publish the significantly reduced eligibility standard this fall. Intervention from Congress is required.

The proposed eligibility change is discriminatory by service, specialty and gender. Only those with a Purple Heart or Silver Star and above will qualify for interment at ANC. The proposal drafted by the Army favors those engaged in close combat, reflects narrow planning parameters, and is insensitive to those who have long planned for their final resting place with full honors.

Military honors serve to comfort the grieving and instill pride in families who witness our nation's final respects for their loved ones. If enacted, the discriminatory eligibility proposal will not account for the void of military honors for those forced to different cemeteries. Consider the impact to a Vietnam veteran with Bronze Star for Valor, or a Cold War submariner amassing years of duty underway, a bomber or missile crewmember, the medical professionals fighting COVID and many others who also risk their lives for our nation. The changes proposed will render them ineligible.

Eligibility changes for burial at ANC constitute more than a solution to a math and geography problem — they will force many to alter their end-of-life plans, or worse, force families to make decisions counter to previous eligibility without input from their deceased loved ones. The proposed plan seeks to “kick the can down the road” by reducing another benefit. Even with dramatically reduced eligibility, ANC will eventually run out of room.

The Coalition recommends language in the FY22 NDAA that directs DoD to submit a report on the location for the next national cemetery that will afford full military honors, as indicated in the ANC 2017 report to Congress, 3.2.2.3 Option 2C. This direction will account for those who are currently eligible and have already planned for ANC to be their final resting place. Designating the next national cemetery that affords full military honors, similar to those rendered at ANC, is a matter of national conscience. We appreciate your consideration of these concerns and stand ready to work with you to preserve this sacred benefit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Du Teil". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a stylized "D".

Jack Du Teil
President,
The Military Coalition

The Military Coalition:

Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA)

American Veterans (AMVETS)

Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS)

Blinded Veterans Association (BVA)

Chief Warrant Officers Association of the US Coast Guard (CWOA)

Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc. (COA)

Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS)

Fleet Reserve Association (FRA)

Gold Star Wives of America (GSW)

Iraq Afghanistan Veterans Association (IAVA)

Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (JWV)

Marine Corps League (MCL)

Marine Corps Reserve Association (MCRA)

Military Chaplains Association of the United States of America (MCA)

Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)

National Military Family Association (NMFA)

Naval Enlisted Reserve Association (NERA)

Non Commissioned Officers Association (NCOA)

Reserve Organization of America (ROA)

Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA)

The Independence Fund (TIF)

United States Army Warrant Officers Association (USAWOA)

USCG Chief Petty Officers Association (CPOA)

VetsFirst, United Spinal Association

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)