

## **Increase General Fund Support for State Veterans Cemeteries.**

### **Remove Spouse Burial Fees**

**OBJECTIVE:** To supply an additional \$300,000 (General Fund) per fiscal year to the Virginia Department of Veterans Services so that the spousal burial fee may be eliminated at Virginia's three state veterans' cemeteries.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

- National Cemeteries operated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), such as the ones in Culpeper and Quantico are 100% federal funded.
  - The VA does not charge a burial fee for Veterans.
  - The VA does not charge a burial fee for spouses.
- The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) operates three state veterans' cemeteries - in Amelia, Dublin, and Suffolk.
  - VDVS does not charge a burial fee for Veterans. VDVS receives a one-time partial reimbursement (known as a plot allowance) from the VA that cover a portion of VDVS cemetery operations. The remainder is funded by the General Fund.
  - VDVS charges a \$400 spouse burial fee to support cemetery operations and maintenance. The VA does not provide any funding for spouses buried at state veterans' cemeteries.
- Operational funding for Virginia's state veterans' cemeteries comes from the VA plot allowance (approximately 45%), the Commonwealth's General Fund (approximately 45%), and the spouse burial fee (approximately 10%).

#### **DISCUSSION:**

- Along-standing Veterans benefit provided by the VA is a final resting place for eligible Veterans and spouses in National Cemeteries that have space.
- When the National Cemeteries began to run out of space in the 1970s, the VA established a grant program for the construction of state veterans' cemeteries, with a goal of placing a National, State, or Tribal veteran's cemetery within seventy-five miles of 95% of the population. Since 1978, many states have established their own Veteran Cemeteries to ensure that this benefit is available to their Veterans.
- VA grants funded the construction of three state veterans' cemeteries in Virginia (Amelia, Dublin, and Suffolk), which are operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services. VA has also awarded Virginia several grants for phased expansion.

- Between 700-800 spouses per year are buried at Virginia's state veterans' cemeteries. The spouse burial fee provides critical funding that directly supports the operations and maintenance of our cemeteries, including salaries for forty-two employees (36 full-time, six wage).
- There is a disparity between National Veterans Cemeteries in Virginia (no charge for spouse burials) and Virginia State Veterans Cemeteries (\$400 charge).
- The VDVS budget should be increased by \$300,000 (General Fund) per fiscal year so that this disparity can be eliminated at Virginia's three state veterans' cemeteries.
  - Virginia should work with its federal elected officials to extend the VA plot allowance to spouses buried at all state veterans' cemeteries nationwide.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Governor and General Assembly appropriate an additional \$300,000 (General Fund) to the Virginia Department of Veterans Services so that the spouse burial charge may be eliminated at Virginia State Veterans Cemeteries, and that Virginia work with Congress to secure the funding (in the VA budget) to extend the VA plot allowance to spouses at all state veterans cemeteries nationwide.