



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF  
VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

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RICHMOND VA 23219

*Air Force Association*  
*Air Force Sergeants Association*  
*American Legion*  
*AMVETS*  
*Association of the United States Army*  
*Disabled American Veterans*  
*Fifth Baptist Church Veterans Ministry*  
*Fleet Reserve Association*  
*Legion of Valor of the U.S., Inc.*  
*Marine Corps League*  
*Military Officers Association of America*  
*Military Order of the Purple Heart*  
*Military Order of the World Wars*  
*Navy Mutual Aid Association*  
*Paralyzed Veterans of America*  
*Reserve Organization of America*  
*Roanoke Valley Veterans Council*  
*Veterans of Foreign Wars*  
*Vietnam Veterans of America*  
*Virginia Army/Air National Guard Enlisted Association*  
*Virginia National Guard Association*  
*Women Marines Association*  
*Wounded Warrior Project*

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**Position Paper 2023-04**

**Appropriate \$400,000 (GF) for State Veterans Cemeteries to Eliminate Spouse Burial Fee and Guard/Reserve Burial Fee**

**OBJECTIVE:** To appropriate an additional \$400,000 (GF) per fiscal year to the Virginia Department of Veterans Services to eliminate the Spouse burial fee and the Guard/Reserve burial fee at Virginia state veterans cemeteries.

**BACKGROUND:**

- The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) operates three state veterans cemeteries: in Amelia, Dublin, and Suffolk.
- Veterans are buried at no charge.
- DVS charges a burial fee for Spouses and for members of the Guard/Reserve who do not meet the federal definition of a veteran because they did not serve 24 consecutive months on active duty.
- Operational funding comes from:
  - The General Fund.
  - The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) through a one-time “plot allowance” payment for veterans (but not for Spouses or for Guard/Reserve members who do not meet the federal definition of a veteran).
  - Burial fees: currently \$400 for Spouses and \$1,700 - \$2,000 for Guard/Reserve (dependent on burial option chosen).
- National Cemeteries operated by the VA, such as the ones in Culpeper and Quantico, are 100% federal funded. They do not charge a burial fee for veterans or for Spouses. Some Guard/Reserve (see below) are not eligible for burial in a National Cemetery.
- The federal *Burial Equity for Guards and Reserves Act* was signed 03/15/2022.
  - The new law authorizes state veterans cemeteries to provide an honored final resting place to former members of the National Guard and Armed Forces Reserve who may not have previously qualified for interment at a veterans cemetery because they did not meet the 24-month minimum active-duty service time.
  - Virginia was the first state in the Nation to provide an honored final resting place for a former Guard/Reserve member under the new eligibility rules.
  - No federal funding was provided.

**DISCUSSION:**

- A long-standing veterans benefit provided by the VA is an honored 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 veterans cemetery within 75 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.
- Virginia's three state veterans cemeteries (Amelia, Dublin, and Suffolk) were constructed with VA grant funds. VA has also awarded Virginia several grants for phased expansion of these cemeteries.
- Between 700-800 spouses per year are buried at Virginia's state veterans cemeteries. The current Spouse burial fee is necessary to support cemetery operations and maintenance not covered by other funding sources.
- There is a disparity between National Cemeteries in Virginia (no charge for spouse burials) and Virginia State Veterans Cemeteries (\$400 charge).
- The Spouse burial fee and the Guard/Reserve burial fee cannot be eliminated without a corresponding General Fund increase. Accordingly, the DVS budget should be increased by \$400,000 (GF) 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 and all former members of the National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves buried at all state veterans cemeteries nationwide.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly appropriate an additional \$400,000 (GF) to the Department of Veterans Services so that the Spouse burial fee and the Guard/Reserve burial fee 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 and all former members of the National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves at all state veterans cemeteries nationwide.