

VFW Auxiliary Member Advocates for Military Survivors

'My husband was only 31 years old, and imagining life without him was something I was not prepared to do'

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A VFW Auxiliary member in January testified at a congressional hearing and highlighted the challenges she and others have faced as members of military and veteran families.

Gabriella Kubinyi testified on issues specifically affecting military families and urged Washington, D.C.'s policymakers to act. Kubinyi testified before a House VA committee hearing titled "The One Percent: Supporting America's Surviving Military Family Community."

Kubinyi emphasized at the meeting the need for increased support and expanded services for those who have lost loved ones in service to the country. She also said that effective communication and outreach from VA is critical. Kubinyi cited challenges faced by survivors in accessing benefits and navigating the claims process.

"Year after year, the VFW and advocates like me ask Congress to improve on a variety of survivor issues, and legislation is drafted but never receives the needed attention or votes to enact significant changes," Kubinyi said. "I strongly urge this committee to find pathways necessary to make sure survivor benefits are taken seriously and not pushed off again for the next Congress."

In Kubinyi's testimony, she spoke about the need for VA to improve education and awareness among survivors regarding their entitlements and benefits. Additionally, Kubinyi said outreach efforts are needed to connect survivors with accredited claims representatives for assistance.

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prepared to do,” Kubinyi said. “Navigating life as a survivor is challenging. I quickly discovered the negative impact of unaddressed gaps in the communication process between VA and its outreach to survivors concerning their eligibility for benefits and services made available by their fallen loved ones.”

Kubinyi’s husband, Navy Engineman 2nd Class Jeffrey Ferren, died on April 2, 2012, due to an undiagnosed heart condition while serving on active duty. Farren served aboard the USS Elron (FFG-550) and USS Oscar Austin (DDG-79) during his military career.

Kubinyi’s testimony also addressed shortcomings in the claims process, particularly the need to increase Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments. She also called for legislative action to update the definition of “surviving spouse” to reflect modern legal and social realities.

“The last time the definition was updated was in 1962, and much has changed in the past 60 years,” Kubinyi said. “The current definition is outdated with its reference to marriage being between people of the opposite sex and to the undefined ‘holding oneself out to be married’ clause. The VFW supports updating this language to ensure the definition of ‘survivor’ is fair and in alignment with marriage requirements of the current era.”

This Washington Wire - Capitol Hill Briefs article is featured in the [2024 April issue of VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.