ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 261 STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED JUNE 1, 2021

Sponsored by: Assemblywoman JOANN DOWNEY District 11 (Monmouth) Assemblyman ERIC HOUGHTALING District 11 (Monmouth) Assemblywoman CLEOPATRA G. TUCKER District 28 (Essex)

Co-Sponsored by: Assemblymen Wirths, Space, Assemblywoman Swain and Assemblyman Tully

SYNOPSIS

Respectfully urges Congress to pass "Ensuring Survivor Benefits During COVID-19 Act of 2021."



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 6/24/2021)

AR261 DOWNEY, HOUGHTALING

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1 AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION respectfully urging the United States 2 Congress to pass the "Ensuring Survivor Benefits During COVID-3 19 Act of 2021." 4 5 WHEREAS, The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted millions of Americans, causing death and devastation in every state and in all 6 7 areas of life; and 8 WHEREAS, The pandemic has impacted veterans just as harshly as any 9 other group of people with over 10,000 deaths recorded alone by 10 homes and centers operated by the United States Department of 11 Veterans Affairs; and 12 WHEREAS, Due to the nature of COVID-19, it is often difficult to 13 determine the principal or contributory causes of death in a person 14 who dies from COVID-19; and 15 WHEREAS, Veterans with service-connected disabilities may have multiple serious health conditions, including cancers, diabetes, 16 17 respiratory issues, and a weakened immune system, which make COVID-19 that much more dangerous; and 18 WHEREAS, The families of veterans with service-connected disabilities 19 20 who have died as a result of contracting COVID-19 are potentially at 21 risk of losing their survivor benefits because the death certificate for 22 those veterans lists COVID-19 as the principal or contributory cause 23 of death; and 24 WHEREAS, The United States Congress has introduced the bipartisan 25 "Ensuring Survivor Benefits During COVID-19 Act of 2021" which 26 would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to get a medical 27 opinion to determine if a service-connected disability was the principal or contributory cause of death in situations where a 28 29 veteran's death certificate identifies COVID-19 as the principal or 30 contributory cause of death; and 31 WHEREAS, The medical opinion required by this act would ensure that the families of those veterans would not be denied any survivor 32 33 benefits because the death certificate does not clearly identify any of the veteran's service-connected disabilities as the principal or 34 contributory cause of death; and 35 WHEREAS, The federal legislation would help the families of veterans 36 37 with service-connected disabilities by preserving the benefits to 38 which they are entitled; and 39 WHEREAS, Therefore, it is fitting and proper for this House to 40 demonstrate its support for this bipartisan legislation and honor its 41 commitment to veterans and their families by continuing to support 42 their needs and urging Congress to pass this important legislation; 43 now, therefore, 44 45 BE IT RESOLVED by the General Assembly of the State of New 46 Jersey:

AR261 DOWNEY, HOUGHTALING

This House respectfully urges the United States Congress to
 support veterans with disabilities and their families by passing the
 "Ensuring Survivor Benefits During COVID-19 Act of 2021."

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5 2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State, 6 shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly to the 7 President of the United States, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the 8 Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, the Majority 9 and Minority Leaders of the United States Senate and United States 10 House of Representatives, and each member of the United States 11 Congress elected from the State of New Jersey.

STATEMENT

This resolution respectfully urges the United States Congress to
pass the "Ensuring Survivor Benefits During COVID-19 Act of
2021."

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused massive disruption, death, and devastation across the world. United States veterans have been impacted just as significantly as others. The Department of Veterans Affairs has recorded over 10,000 deaths from COVID-19 at their centers and homes. That figure does not account for the death tolls in state-run and privately run veterans facilities.

25 One group at the greatest risk is veterans with service-connected 26 disabilities. Their service-connected disabilities may have multiple 27 serious health conditions, including cancers, diabetes, respiratory 28 issues, and a weakened immune system, which make COVID-19 that 29 much more dangerous. When a veteran dies as a result of COVID-30 19, their death certificate will list COVID-19 as the principal or 31 contributory cause of death. However, the death certificate often 32 fails to list any of the veteran's service-connected disabilities, which 33 may be the principal or contributory cause of death. This oversight 34 potentially puts the families of those veterans at risk of losing the 35 survivor benefits to which they are entitled.

The bipartisan "Ensuring Survivor Benefits During COVID-19 36 37 Act of 2021" currently introduced in the United States Congress 38 would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to get a medical 39 opinion to determine if a service-connected disability was the 40 principal or contributory cause of death in situations where a 41 veteran's death certificate identifies COVID-19 as the principal or 42 contributory cause of death. The medical opinion required by this 43 act would ensure that the families of those veterans would not be 44 denied any survivor benefits because the death certificate does not 45 clearly identify any of the veteran's service-connected disabilities as 46 the principal or contributory cause of death. The federal legislation 47 would help the families of veterans with service-connected 48 disabilities by preserving the benefits to which they are entitled.