

ASSEMBLY MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 261

**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

DATED: JUNE 9, 2021

The Assembly Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee reports favorably Assembly Resolution No. 261.

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.

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

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