



**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD OF  
MR. ROBERT J. BORKA  
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
MARINE CORPS LEAGUE  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ON  
AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE OF  
H.R. 6047 SHARRI BRILEY AND ERIC EDMUNDSON  
VETERANS BENEFITS EXPANSION ACT OF 2025**

**JANUARY 14, 2026**

Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the distinct opportunity to provide this testimony for the record regarding the proposed Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute (ANS) to H.R. 6047 "Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act of 2025". The Marine Corps League (MCL) is the only Congressionally chartered United States Marine Corps-related Veterans Service Organization that serves to ensure veterans, especially Marines, FMF Service members and families receive the care, dignity and support they have earned through their dedicated service.

**Amendment in the Nature of Substitute to  
H.R. 6047, Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act**

The Death and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) program pays a monthly tax-free monetary benefit to eligible survivors of active-duty service members who died in line of duty, veteran whose death was caused by a service-connected injury or illness, or veteran who was totally disabled from service or from VA medical care. According to Veterans Benefits Administration data, there were 519,450 DIC recipients in the United States and 93.6% were over 57 years old in Fiscal Year 2024<sup>1</sup>. Currently, the monthly payment for DIC recipient is \$1,699.36 since December 2025<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Veterans Benefits Administration, "Annual Benefits Report Fiscal Year 2024", <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2024-abr.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, "Current DIC rates for spouses and dependents", <https://www.va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/survivor-compensation/dependency-indemnity-compensation/survivor-rates/>, accessed January 8, 2026

Although each year the DIC rate is adjusted based on Cost-of-living rate, there has been no significant increase for DIC rate, especially when compared to other survivor benefits plans with other federal agencies. When a totally disabled veteran passed away, the eligible spouse would only receive 40.87% of what the veteran had been paid<sup>3</sup>. According to Defense Finance and Accounting Service, the Department of Defense (DoD) survivor benefit plan allows “up to 55 percent of a service member’s retired pay”<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, survivors of federal employees are also receiving higher percentage of retirement pay. Under the Federal Employees’ Retirement System (FERS), the surviving spouses are eligible to receive “equal to 50% of the employee’s final salary...plus ... \$43,800.53 for deaths after December 1, 2025.”<sup>5</sup> This discrepancy caused financial hardship for survivors of the veterans and service members.

Additionally, veterans who are catastrophically disabled and receiving the Special Monthly Compensation under the 38 U.S.C. § 1114(r) and § 1114 (t) are not properly compensated based on research. Under 38 U.S.C. § 1114, those veterans receiving benefits under subsection (r) and (t) requires regular aid and attendance that would require “hospitalization, nursing home care, or other residential institutional care”. According to research from Federal Long Term Care Insurance program 2024 Cost of Care survey, national average annual costs for home care is \$51,480 (\$4,290 per month), for assisted living is \$66,132 (\$5,511 per month), and for nursing home is \$112,420 (\$9,368.3 per month)<sup>6</sup>. Even with aid and attendance and housebound allowance, the amount<sup>7</sup> will not match the increasing long-term care for the majority of the catastrophically disabled veterans. This research also supports that the aging group of DIC recipients are facing long-term care issues.

The Marine Corps League sincerely appreciates the efforts of this Committee and the sponsors of the ANS to this bill to reduce the disparity between the benefits provided to the survivors of our nation’s heroes and those survivors of federal employees in America. Section 2(a) of this legislation will provide an additional \$833.33 monthly benefits, around, \$10,000 per year, to offset the increasing nursing home expenses over the years, ensuring catastrophically disabled veterans continue to receive quality care with dignity. Also, Section 2(b) of this legislation will provide an increase of one percent in addition to cost-of-living adjustment for all DIC recipients for the next three years. This provision will ensure our Gold Star families and survivors receive equitable benefits compared to government-sector counterparts and will directly benefit over

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<sup>3</sup> Current rate for a 100% disabled veteran with a spouse is \$4,158.17 per month. DIC rate of \$1,699.36 is 40.87% of that amount.

<sup>4</sup> Defense Finance and Accounting Service, “Understanding SBP, DIC and SSIA”, <https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/survivors/Understanding-SBP-DIC-SSIA/>, accessed January 8, 2026

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Office of Personnel Management, “Deceased Employees Covered Under FERS”, <https://www.opm.gov/retirement-center/fers-information/survivors/>, accessed January 8, 2026

<sup>6</sup> The Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program, “2024 Cost of Care Survey”, <https://cdn.ltcfeds.gov/planning-tools/downloads/Cost-of-Care-Survey.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> According to VA, current SMC rate under subsection (r) and (t) are around \$10,000-\$11,000 per month. See <https://www.va.gov/disability/compensation-rates/special-monthly-compensation-rates/>

519,000 DIC beneficiaries including survivors of CWO3 Donovan Briley and SGT Eric Edmundson.

Marine Corps League understands the funds must come from somewhere. Section 3 of this provision will increase one percent interest rate for veterans and service members with existing VA mortgage who seek an Interest Rate Reduction Refinance Loan (IRRRL) as well as proposing to slightly increase the VA home loan funding fees for non-disabled veterans. Veterans with a service-connected disability will continue to not pay the funding fee. While we certainly wish the Congress would directly appropriate funds to support Section 2 of this legislation, we also recognize that it is meaningless if the bill becomes financially impractical to enforce. When over half million survivors and catastrophically disabled veterans have been waiting decades for this significant increase of their benefits, Congress must take action to deliver these benefits and honor the promise made by the American people to those who served.

In addition, Section 3 increases the IRRRL fee, which only affects those who have an existing VA loan. Even though this will add cost to those purchasing or refinancing their home, current law allows veterans to roll their fees into their mortgage payment, and those fees are minimal according to calculation<sup>8</sup>. This provision continues to guarantee the benefits for veterans purchasing their home using the VA loan.

Again, we appreciate the efforts made by the Members of this Committee. We understand the immense challenge of being fiscally responsible and doing what is right for people.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, the Marine Corps League sincerely appreciates the continued work of this Subcommittee. We look forward to continuing working with Congress, and the VA to ensure that all veterans, especially our Marines, FMF Service members, and their families, have a strong and enduring voice on this matter. For further information regarding this testimony, please contact Robert Borka or Philip Du at Marine Corps League.

**Semper Fidelis.**

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<sup>8</sup> House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, "One Pager for HVAC Benefits Expansion Act of 2025", <https://veterans.house.gov> (An average increasing the IRRRL fee of \$10 more per month for only those who choose to refinance their current VA home loan; increasing the initial funding fee by average of \$3 more per month for non-disabled veterans and increasing the funding fee for subsequent usage (purchase of a second or additional home) on average \$13 more per month for non-disabled veterans.)