



July 24, 2017 - **URGENT BEFORE SENATE APPROVAL of HR-2810**  
**National Defense Authorization Act for 2018**

Chairman of Senator Armed Services Committee  
Senator John McCain

Senators Jack Reed, Lindsay Graham, Bill Nelson, James Inhofe, Claire McCaskill, Roger Wicker,  
Senators Jeanne Shaheen, Deb Fischer, Kirsten Gillibrand, Tom Cotton, Richard Blumenthal,  
Senators Joni Ernst, Thom Tillis, Joe Donnelly, Dan Sullivan, David Perdue, Mazie Hirono,  
Senators Tim Cain, Ted Cruz, Angus King, Martin Heinrich, Ben Sasse, Elizabeth Warren,  
Senators Luther Strange and Gary Peters ,

Re: Surviving Dependents and Transferability

Dear Senator McCain and Senators of the Senate Armed Forces Committee,

Please pardon any lack of appropriate salutations or protocol as I am writing both as Founder & President of Homefront Hugs USA and a military mother. I have a US Air Force dependent son whose father passed of sadly the same brain cancer - GBM- as another American hero and patriot- you, Senator McCain are fighting now. We know if anyone can beat this - you can.

My son grieved all over again when he heard your news as when he heard the news of former VP Joe Biden's son - Beau . We know you are a fighter and will help personally and as an organization any way we can do you beat this, sir. My son already started something but it's a surprise .

We know all the other senators on this committee irregardless of political affiliation feel the same way but I want you to know there is an 18 year old here whose own combat pilot father fought this with all he had, and he is rooting for you . His photo is below .

We are asking for an amendment /addition of HR-2810 to include surviving children of veterans who served with honor but for health reasons did not assign their GI BILL education benefits to their children before their deaths . Our son lost his father, LTC Gary Ducote , to a Glioblastoma Brain Tumor afte a hard fight for 3 years . He fought for many years, retired after 25 PLUS years of service to fight it with all he had left but lost his final battle in 2012.

The lagging tragic issue :

My son's father was never able and well enough in the end to assign his earned GI education benefits to his son - our son. I beg you to include these surviving dependents in your bill as they fall through the cracks . Every day is a reminder as our son has reached 18, that he will not be able to benefit from the GI education bill because of his father's loss to brain cancer . My son is not the only dependent that falls into this category . There are not thousands but there are enough and this matters to their hero's legacy and what their veterans and parents would have wanted .

Homefront Hugs USA, 1881 W.Liberty Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103

We applaud you for your efforts in helping to formulate and introducing this current bill which is long overdue . We were not able to approach the House committee as we approached the wrong committee first and were just told now by Rep.Walz's office to revise immediately and direct this to all of you before recess and before Senate passage .

We are a grass roots organization still but after 16 years of service we believe we understand the issues very well . We have served thousands of veterans and families including advising them after the loss of a loved one . We work in conjunction with many other worthy organizations and overlap at times but never needlessly . The needs are too great for support before, during and after deployments and service .

These surviving children of our veterans should not be forgotten . Our veterans who pass away whether on active duty or retired **after a full honorable career in the military** should be able to assign posthumously any GI BILL education benefits to their surviving children . Sometimes due to family dysfunction, mental incapacitation, serious illness like the brain cancer which befell our family, our veterans are unable to assign these benefits to their children. Upon death - the current laws do not permit this. This was the case for my son's father, diagnosed with GBM brain cancer forcing retirement after 25 years . He battled the cancer fiercely but after three years passed away .

If he had remembered and been mentally capacitated enough, Gary would have assigned our son those GI Bill benefits. He **earned those benefits** for himself and his family - from the wars he fought in and his honorable service for 25 years in the United States Air Force as a combat pilot and commander.

Yet his son has none of these benefits now except the ability to use the commissary and base exchange, and healthcare through age 26 . My son is one of many military children who fell between the cracks due to divorce, family tragedy or death where service member did not assign the education benefits they could desperately use now to attend a vocational school or college .

We are asking for an amendment which allows all surviving children of service members who served our country honorably before they passed away to be awarded the education benefits through the GI Bill .

◆ You could stipulate years of service if you wished perhaps a minimum of 10 years in any of our military branches .

◆ You could stipulate how long dependents have to utilize these benefits perhaps up to age 28- 30 .

I plead for our son and other children whose parents earned these benefits . I feel more desperate as our son begins college this year and you are about to pass this new bill for 2018.

Some have said these children can apply for scholarships but with the cost of colleges - there are not enough scholarship for our military dependents and most are given to children of fallen heroes who died in battle . My son's father battled undiagnosed PTSD and then cancer and retired only after 25 years to battle this cancer or he probably would have worked until the very end .

I know he would want our son to have these benefits without a second thought . I beg you in his honor not to forget his only son and the dependents that fall in this category . We will come down to Washington anytime to thank you, to let you know how much his means to so many not just our son but we know time is of the essence .

His son helps me run Homefront Hugs in his honor and applied for as many scholarships as possible from the military but only received one for \$2000 from the Air Force Aid Society for the entire year. That will

not take him very far and yet organizations have to divide the money carefully amongst too many military dependents .

Please do not forget these kids who fell between the cracks. Their parents served with honor and they have had to grow up without them - a price tough enough to pay . Your news, Senator McCain, broke our son's heart and brought back a lot of pain . We will keep you in our prayers and hope too that you will not forget these surviving children who should be entitled to these education benefits .

Our son's father cannot come back from the dead to fight for this to be given to his son . So I am speaking for him and our son and asking you do this in honor of his sacrifices and service . I speak also for the other surviving dependents who like our son have fallen through the cracks .

I want you to imagine this was your son or daughter who could not access benefits you earned after 25 years of sacrifice and then brain cancer. This was part of Gary's legacy and his last gift for his son .

Thank you for your time and God bless you Senator and all those who served our country on this committee with great sacrifice.

We are visiting Arlington Cemetery to honor my son's father this weekend and would make time to come see anyone willing to speak with us Friday, Monday or even Tuesday .

You can contact me via email or 734/330-8203. Aim High Forever.

Respectfully, Shalom.

*Alessandra Kellermann*

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Homefront Hugs USA

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Our son so you know his face as he is not just a number neither are the other surviving dependents whose parents earned the benefits :



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