

Margaret M. McCloud

RE: Public Comments for January 31, 2022 VA Finance Committee - HB 957

Good afternoon. My name is Maggie McCloud and I am the surviving spouse of Marine LtCol Joseph Trane McCloud. My husband was in combat, on active duty, serving in Iraq in 2006 when his helicopter crash landed at Haditha Dam. He and three others aboard were killed. Had his helicopter been shot down by enemy fire, his death would be considered killed in action and I would then qualify for the Virginia property tax relief, but because it was an accident in combat, I am now told that I am ineligible.

In 2015 upon passage of the Amendment to provide the property tax exemption to the surviving spouses of fallen military members I applied for and was granted the exemption by Fairfax County. Then last year I received a letter from the County informing me that upon a review of their records I was inappropriately granted the exemption because his death was not the result of hostile combat action.

To grant me the exemption and then to remove it retroactively years later with a short letter in the mail is shocking, unjust and unfair to my family, and an insult to my husband's death in military service. The Department of Defense considers me a "Gold Star" spouse as my husband was serving in a combat operation. I receive no difference in federal benefits from the DoD than any other spouse considered "killed in action." The precedent for this exemption was established. Is my husband's death in Iraq no less worthy than another's? If my husband had survived, been severely wounded, declared 100% disabled and then died, I would receive the property tax exemption.

The intent of the law was certainly to honor and share the sacrifice of service members such as my husband who served 17 years in the United States Marine Corps and who also owned property in Virginia as well.

The Virginia Constitutional amendments for 100% permanently and total disabled veterans and first responders provide benefits for line of duty deaths and to their surviving spouses. The surviving spouses of those who die on active duty should receive no less than what has been provided to the others.

Virginia Law should be changed to reflect that all military surviving spouses of those who died on active duty who are eligible for federal survivor benefits receive the property tax exemption. I respectfully ask for your support of all efforts to fix this inequity.

Thank you.

Maggie McCloud
Mount Vernon District
Fairfax County