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Testimony for Traci J. Voelke in Support of HB957- Kathy Tran, Property Tax Relief for Military Widows

My name is Traci Voelke and I am the Surviving Spouse of MAJ Paul C. Voelke, who was killed by a MRAP (Mine-resistant, ambush protected) vehicle in 2012, in Mazar-i-Sharif. He was supporting the Special Forces, in a combat zone during Operation Enduring Freedom. We were married for 12 years, and this was his 5th deployment overseas, serving two prior tours in Iraq, one prior tour in Afghanistan and a tour to Kosovo. Paul had earned three bronze stars, the combat infantryman's badge and several other accolades during his 14 years of service. I became a widow when I was 37 years old. Paul and I had two young children we owned a home in Virginia.

I had applied for the 'Killed in Action' property tax relief under Virginia law, in Fairfax County. I was granted relief but this past May, Fairfax County sent me a letter stating that I was erroneously granted relief and may be subject to 3 years of back property taxes.

The Department of Defense makes no distinction between Paul's death and a death 'Killed in Action.' I receive the same Federal Benefits as any other spouse who died in the 'Line of duty.' I wear a purple lapel pin with a star, as I am considered a Gold Star Spouse.

Had Paul had been severely injured in Afghanistan, returned home and been deemed 100% disabled, and then died, I would have qualified for property tax relief under Virginia's disabled Veteran Law. First responders in Virginia killed "In-the-Line of Duty," are also granted property tax relief. Clearly the Virginia law left us out.

Please support this injustice to those paid the ULTIMATE sacrifice. Tax relief should be granted to all Military Widows whose spouses died "In the Line of Duty."

Kathy Tran's Bill gives counties the LOCAL OPTION to grant relief to these widows. Approximately 30 Active Duty Widows per year have a nexus to Virginia. Please support sharing this sacrifice to all Virginians.