



*Caring for the Families of America's Fallen Heroes since 1994.*

## **GOLD STAR FAMILIES COMPACT**

### **Gold Star Family-Friendly States and Territories**

As the national provider of compassionate care and resources for all those grieving the death of a military loved one, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is committed to ensuring that all survivors are respected and their needs are met. Through feedback from tens of thousands of survivors, the desire for respect for the sacrifice of their military or veteran loved one, and recognition for their loss is consistently highlighted as a primary need. Challenges to achieving respect and recognition are most commonly found among state and territory benefits and services. To address these challenges, TAPS encourages improvement in five key areas.

#### **★ Adopt a Respectful and Inclusive Definition of “Gold Star”**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs does not distinguish by cause of death. There is no differentiation of government benefits to survivors based on the location or circumstances of a service member's death. In contrast, state and territory definitions of “Gold Star” are more narrow in scope, with some only including those killed in combat. This disparity causes survivors to face barriers to state and territory benefits and assistance. TAPS encourages the adoption of a respectful and inclusive definition of Gold Star that encompasses all service-related deaths with the phrase, “died while serving or from a service-connected injury or illness.”

#### **★ Expand Gold Star License Plate Eligibility**

Adopting inclusive definitions will help expand eligibility and access to benefits such as Gold Star license plates. These plates serve as a visible tribute to the service and sacrifice of military loved ones. Expanding eligibility for Gold Star license plates will provide more surviving families with a tangible way to honor their loved ones and be recognized for their own shared sacrifice.

#### **★ Increase Access to Tuition Waivers for Surviving Spouses and Children**

Tuition waivers are an essential benefit offered by 92% of states and territories to support surviving families. However, many do not include “died while serving or from a service-connected injury or illness” within their eligibility criteria and many also require that the state or territory be the service member's home of record. Given the highly mobile nature of military family life, surviving families often do not reside in the service member's home of record. Eliminating these restrictions will increase access to tuition waivers and other educational benefits designed to support and honor surviving families.

#### **★ Extend Property Tax Waivers to All Surviving Spouses**

The death of a loved one can cause significant financial turmoil for surviving spouses, regardless of how the loved one died. Property tax waivers will help alleviate this burden; however, many states and territories only offer this benefit to certain eligible veterans and their surviving spouses or to surviving spouses of service members killed in action. Extending property tax waivers to all surviving spouses will reduce the financial burdens on them after the death of their loved ones.

#### **★ Reduce Income Tax on Military Survivor Benefits**

The Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) protects survivors of service members against a loss of financial security. A growing number of states and territories choose to recognize military service and sacrifice by providing favorable tax treatment for military retirement pay and SBP. Expanding these tax exemptions will recognize Gold Star Families' sacrifices and provide survivors greater financial stability.