

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON **VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

CHAIRMAN MIKE BOST

H.R. 7100: Prioritizing Veterans' Survivors Act

Background:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Survivors Assistance (OSA) was established by the *Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110-389, section 222)* to, in part, "serve as a principal advisor to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on all matters related to the policies, programs, legislative issues, and other initiatives affecting" veterans' survivors. But in February 2021, the OSA was moved from the Office of the VA Secretary to the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Pension & Fiduciary Service (P&F), and OSA stopped meeting biweekly with the Office of the VA Secretary. Following this move, OSA's three full-time employees focus has shifted to casework and outreach, instead of fixing policy and program-wide problems that survivors face as a whole. This current organizational structure hinders OSA's ability to serve as a principal advisor to the Secretary on policies affecting veterans' surviving loved ones. Overall, OSA's move to P&F reflects a de-prioritization of veteran survivors' issues despite caring for survivors being a key part of VA's core mission.

The *Prioritizing Veterans' Survivors Act*, introduced by Rep. Ciscomani with Chairman Bost as original co-sponsor, would ensure that OSA operates within the Office of the VA Secretary to ensure that VA prioritizes advocacy and services for veterans' surviving spouses and families.

The Message:

- Our nation owes our men and women in uniform a debt that can never fully be repaid, especially those whose loved one's made the ultimate sacrifice.
- The *Prioritizing Veterans' Survivors Act* would rightfully restore VA's Survivor Assistance Office's position within the Office of the VA Secretary, to ensure that veteran survivor issues *always* have a seat at the table.
- Though the Office of Survivors Assistance was established to serve as a principal advisor to the VA Secretary on policies impacting military servicemembers' and veterans' survivors, in February 2021, it was relegated to the Veterans Benefits Administration, Pension & Fiduciary Service, thus hindering OSA's ability to serve as a principal advisor to the Secretary on policies affecting veterans' surviving loved ones.