

OVERVIEW OF SURVIVING SPOUSE VIRTUAL CHAPTER MEETING

19 March 2024

The guest speaker was RADM Ann Duff, USN (Ret) Assistant Director, Office of Survivor Assistance, Pension and Fiduciary Service. She gave a brief overview of the types of assistance her office can provide in helping Surviving Spouses like assistance with obtaining **VA Survivor Benefits**, if eligible. Some deceased veterans that were determined ineligible for VA benefits in the past, might be eligible now due to the PACT Act. Thus, the Surviving Spouse might be eligible to receive DIC (Disability and Indemnity compensation). The VA will be contacting survivors who were previously denied per their website. **Bereavement counseling** and assistance obtaining the loved one's DD-214 or other vital records from the **National Archives** are also available. More information may be obtained at <https://www.va.gov/survivors/> or call 1-800-827-1000 per benefits. RADM Duff provided her email address ann.duff@va.org if anyone had further questions.

Several legislative issues related to Surviving Spouses were discussed by RADM Duff at this meeting and again by Gail Joyce during the Surviving Spouse Training with the MOAA Council and Chapter Affairs Virtual Workshop for New Leaders on 27 March.

- **Caring for Survivors Act of 2023:** HR1083/S414. HR 1083 has 81 cosponsors and was introduced by Rep Hayes from CT in February 2024. S 414 has 22 cosponsors (none from Virginia) after being introduced by Sen Tester from MT in Feb 2024. This bill would raise DIC to the same levels as another federal survivor programs. <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2023-news-articles/advocacy/this-bipartisan-bill-would-strengthen-earned-support-for-survivors-of-veterans/> **Note:** Edie Smith, Surviving Spouse that was PACMOAA speaker in April 2022, is one of the administrators of the DIC Surviving Spouses/DIC Increase Advocacy Facebook group that has 1300 members.
- **Love Lives On Act of 2023:** HR3651/S1266. HR 3651 currently has 43 cosponsors and was introduced by Rep Phillips from MN in May 2023. S 1266 has 28 cosponsors and was introduced by Sen Moran from KS in April 2023. This bill allows surviving spouses that remarry before the age of 55 to continue to receive survivor benefits and DIC. <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2023-news-articles/spouse-and-family/senate-bill-would-end-remarriage-penalty-for-surviving-spouses/> Gold Star Wives and widows have been working on this issue for years per RADM Duff.

After RADM Duff's presentation and Q & A Session, the membership Chair noted at that the Surviving Spouse Virtual Chapter (SSVC) has 243 members with 4 pending and is the 2nd largest of the 6 MOAA Virtual Chapters. The MOAA Uniformed Services Nurse Advocates Virtual Chapter (MUSNAVC) is the largest. Members were reminded about the Book Club that meets monthly. Examples of some books read/discussed include "The Wild Swans" and "Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson and the Opening of the American West".

The Surviving Spouse Virtual Chapter meets monthly. Program meetings at 1 pm on the 3rd Tuesday of each month alternate with a social hour at 5 pm. Surviving Spouses and Surviving Spouse Liaisons are eligible for membership.