

# THE CONNECTION



Air Force Families Forever Newsletter

2022, VOL. 3, ISSUE 2

*For Air Force and Space Force Families Across the Department of the Air Force*

## Mark Your Calendar

Tragedy Assistance Program for  
Survivors (TAPS)

3-5 February (FL)

[Southeast Regional Military Survivor  
Seminar and Good Grief Camp](#)

OR

31 March-2 April (CO)

[Mountain Regional Military Survivor  
Seminar and Good Grief Camp](#)

Medal of Honor Day

March 25

National Vietnam War Veterans Day

March 29

Month of the Military Child

April

Gold Star Spouses Day

April 5

National Siblings Day

April 10

Air Force Reserve Birthday

April 14

National Explosive Ordnance

Disposal Day

May 6

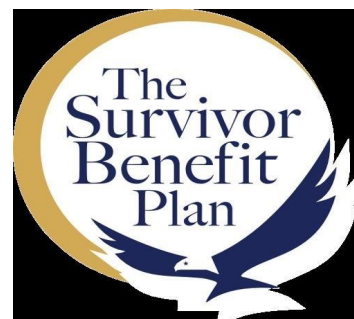
## Final Phase of SBP-DIC Offset Elimination

CLEVELAND, OH—The Department of Defense Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) provides financial support to military spouses and/or children when a military member dies on active duty or inactive duty in the line of duty. SBP provides eligible beneficiaries with a monthly payment known as an annuity. The recipient of an SBP annuity is referred to as the annuitant. The annuitant may be a surviving spouse or surviving child (but not both).

When a service member dies on active or inactive duty in the line of duty, the surviving spouse can request to have the SBP annuity paid directly to an eligible dependent child or children. This is called the “Optional Annuity for Dependent Children” also referred to as “the optional child annuity.”

Until recently, there was a requirement for a spouse’s SBP payments to be offset (reduced) by the full amount of the spouse’s Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payment from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Payments to the surviving child were often considered a more favorable option because SBP paid to a child is not required to be offset (reduced) by the DIC payment.

The Optional Annuity for Dependent Children is only allowed when the service member died on active or inactive duty, in the line of duty, after October 7, 2001. There was no SBP annuity for surviving



spouses and/or children prior to the law change by Congress after the tragic events of 9/11.

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2020 modified the law that requires an offset (reduction) of SBP payments for surviving spouses who are also entitled to DIC payments from the VA. It directed a mandatory phase-out period that will eventually eliminate the entire offset (reduction). Beginning on January 1, 2023, surviving spouses can receive full SBP payments from DoD/DFAS in addition to their full DIC payments from the VA.

The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2020 also directed that as of January 1, 2023, the “Optional Annuity for Dependent Children” will be eliminated and the SBP annuity payment must revert to the surviving spouse (if the surviving spouse submits documentation confirming eligibility). This provision is mandated by law and is not voluntary.

Continued on page 2

## FINAL PHASE Continued from Page 1

### What Will Happen in 2023

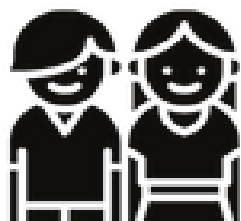
SBP annuities that were directed to a child rather than a surviving spouse will revert to the surviving spouse (if she or he submits documentation and is eligible) as of January 1, 2023.

Keep in mind that 2023 is the third and final phase of the SBP-DIC Offset Phased Elimination. Beginning January 1 of 2023, the offset is eliminated, so spouses will receive their full DIC payment from the VA and the full SBP payment issued by DFAS.

If you remarried after the death of the member (before age 55), you may not be eligible for the SBP annuity. DFAS must receive documentation from you, even if you believe you may not be eligible due to remarriage. If the documentation determines that you are not eligible due to remarriage, the child will continue receiving the annuity, even after January of 2023. However, if no documentation is received to confirm eligibility, the child annuity payments will suspend as of January 2023.

If your child or children lose eligibility because they marry or reach age 18 (or age 22 if a full-time student) prior to January 1, 2023, the annuity will be suspended until January 1, 2023, at which time it will revert to the surviving spouse (if eligible and documents submitted).  
(Courtesy of DFAS).

#### 2023 SBP Optional Child Annuity Elimination & Reversion to Surviving Spouse



**Eligible Child  
SBP Annuitant**  
Currently Receiving  
SBP Monthly Payment  
Because of Optional  
Child Annuity

**CONTINUE TO RECEIVE  
SBP MONTHLY PAYMENTS  
THROUGH JAN 3, 2023**

**AS LONG AS CHILD  
ANNUITANT REMAINS  
ELIGIBLE**

#### 2023 SBP Optional Child Annuity Elimination & Reversion to Surviving Spouse



**Eligible  
Surviving  
Spouse**

**FIRST SBP MONTHLY  
PAYMENT WILL BE  
FEB 1, 2023**

**IF DOCUMENTED AS  
ELIGIBLE**

### INFORMATIONAL WEBSITES:

Annuitant Account Statements are available in your myPay account:

<https://mypay.dfas.mil>

Check out our new Quick Reference Guide on the special focus webpage:

<https://www.dfas.mil/sbpdicnews>

Offset Elimination Information: <https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/survivors/SBP-DIC-News/>

### THE CONNECTION

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<https://www.afpc.af.mil/Airman-and-Family/Air-Force-Families-Forever/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/airmanandfamily>



# Surviving Daughter Turns Grief Into Opportunity

by Maureen Hickman Caporaso  
*Green and Gold Congressional Aide*

Maureen Hickman Caporaso is one of four Gold Star/MIA Daughters of USAF Captain Vincent Joseph Hickman. Captain Hickman was a Navigator with the 1st Air Commando Squadron, based at McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey. Their family had just relocated to Willingboro, N.J. when he received his orders for Bien Hoa, South Vietnam. His wife, Anna, was 29 years old and his four daughters, Eileen, Maureen, Margaret and Patricia, all under the age of five. He was not home for Christmas that year (1963) but sent a beautiful Vietnamese silk Christmas card to "his girls" and promised he would be home the following Christmas.

Maureen tells the story here of her father's bravery and the path it led her down to help others.

On January 14, 1964, his B-26 aircraft was shot down by enemy fire and reported to have crashed and burned. Due to heavy fighting and guerilla activity in the area, no one was able to get to the crash site until January 19th, where they found no evidence of survivors. He is still unaccounted for to this day.

My father received the Air Force Cross and the Purple Heart for his valiant efforts to keep the aircraft aloft after his pilot, Maj. Carl Berg Mitchell, was mortally wounded. Also lost was the South Vietnamese translator.

We had lost our Daddy and suddenly our nighttime prayers included, "God bless Daddy in Heaven."

My father gave his life for his country. My mother was left to pick up the pieces. It was the 1960's, and the Vietnam War was very unpopular. My mother was disrespected by the media and left to fend for herself. She had no

direction, no counseling for herself or her children, and because he was listed as Missing in Action, there was no closure. Sixty years later, we still do not have closure.

In February of 2021, while perusing Indeed.com for employment opportunities, I entered "Gold Star" in the search bar. What appeared was an opportunity with the United States House of Representatives for a Gold Star Family Fellow. I could not believe my eyes. The only thing that was missing in the job description was my name! I reached out to my contact with the Missing Persons Branch of the US Air Force, Sandra Kolb, to see if this opportunity was legitimate. She confirmed that it was and assisted me in getting together some of my father's

records, which were required to apply for the position.

I applied, interviewed with the District Director of the office of Congresswoman Susan Wild in Pennsylvania's District 7, and became the Gold Star Fellow for the office in Easton, PA, on April 1, 2021. I am the third person in the country to be selected for this role in the program, which Congress approved in 2019. The program is now called the Green and Gold Congressional Aide Program and is open to Gold Star Families.

As a Gold Star Fellow, I have had the good fortune of working on behalf of our military, veterans and their families, representing Gold Star Families and speaking on their behalf. A big part of being a Fellow is to assist veterans who reach out after exhausting all other options. This includes health and benefit questions, financial assistance, spousal benefits, service records, medals and commendations and assistance with the transition from military to civilian life. I have held round-table discussions on Toxic Exposure and the PACT Act, held Vietnam Veterans Pinning Ceremonies, spoken at Veterans Day and Memorial Day Ceremonies, and am working to get a Vet Center in the Lehigh Valley.

A very special day for me was participating in the Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC, on Vietnam War Veterans Day. Our family is also honored to have had a Memorial Marker placed for my father at Arlington National Cemetery.



See **SURVIVING** on Page 4

**USAF Captain Vincent Joseph Hickman, member of the 1st Air Commando Squadron. He was the navigator aboard the incident aircraft when it went down on January 14, 1964. His remains have not been recovered. Today, Captain Hickman is memorialized on the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific and on the Vietnam War Memorial (Panel 1 Line 40) Washington, DC. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Maureen Hickman).**

# Keeper Of The Plains

by Stephanie Horocofsky, *Community Readiness Specialist, McConnell AFB, Military and Family Readiness Center*

Inspired by the strength of the survivors to keep their loved one's memory alive, the team at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas, searched for ideas to honor our fallen.

The Keeper of the Plains, a 5-ton, 44 ft steel structure, has a historical presence in our Wichita community. Sculpted by Kiowa-Comanche artist Blackbear Bosin in 1974, the original Keeper stands at the confluence of the Arkansas and Little Arkansas rivers near downtown Wichita, adjacent to the Mid-America All-Indian Center. It has become one of Wichita's most recognized and beloved symbols, aligning and honoring our service members and connecting survivors and Team McConnell by memorializing each of them.

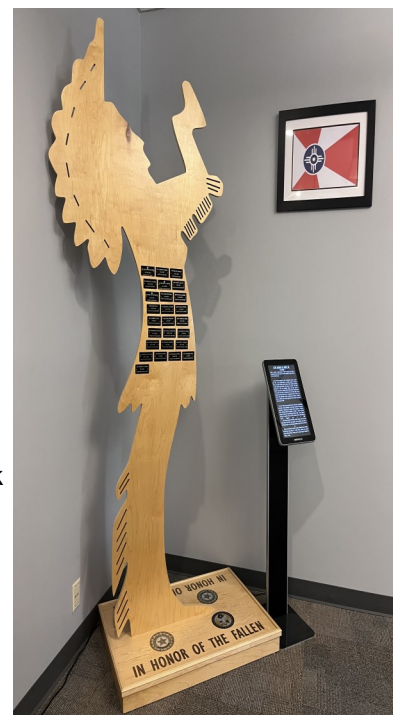
The Keeper of the Plains Memorial proudly displays plaques engraved with the fallen service members name, rank, branch of service, and date of passing. A digital kiosk stands next to the Keeper and displays each member's photo, along with a personable narrative to reflect on their memory.

This memorial stands as a tribute for our Gold Star and Surviving Family Members, whose loved ones either served at McConnell Air Force Base or who have survivors located in our area. The memorial, currently honoring 25 service members, was dedicated by Col. Richard C. Tanner, Commander, 22d Air Refueling Wing, on September 27th, 2020, during McConnell's annual Gold Star and Surviving Family Member's Day.

The Keeper of the Plains Memorial is constructed of lightweight materials, designed to be easily transported around the base for display during Memorial and Veteran's Day, POW/MIA Remembrance Week, Gold Star and Surviving Family Member events, and during Christmas at the base Exchange. This simple yet profound gesture had an immediate impact with our surviving families and members of Team McConnell, many of whom worked alongside their fellow Airmen.

Our goal here at the Military and Family Readiness Center, in alliance with McConnell Air Force Base, is to keep their memory alive- never forgotten in our community.

<https://www.360wichita.com/blog/Local/Keeper-of-the-Plains-History.html>



**Keeper of the Plains steel structure sculpted by Kiowa-Comanche artist Blackbear Bosin. Photo courtesy of McConnell Military and Family Readiness Center.**

## SURVIVING

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**Ms. Maureen Hickman Caporaso, Gold Star Fellow.**

Additionally, I am a member of Sons and Daughters in Touch, a group of "kids" who have lost a parent in Vietnam. This group, led by Tony Cordero, whose father and mine were friends and Air Commandos in Bien Hoa, has been instrumental in my healing, and in bringing me to the forefront of the POW/MIA and Survivor network. This led to becoming a member of the League of POW/MIA Families, whose mission is to get the fullest possible accounting for the missing and repatriation of all recoverable remains of those who died serving our nation during the Vietnam War. In April of 2022, a Joint Field Activity (JFA) took place at one of the sets of coordinates where my father was lost. I am meeting with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) in October for an update.

They say that life begins at the end of your comfort zone. The fact that I am now able to represent Gold Star and MIA Families, and speak on their behalf, is proof of that. My father's death does not define me, but it has shaped me. I believe I am exactly where I am supposed to be and doing what I was meant to do. And I believe my father is very proud.

For questions related to the program, contact Ronnie Ratliff, the Gold Star Family Fellowship Program manager, at [HouseGoldStarProgram@mail.house.gov](mailto:HouseGoldStarProgram@mail.house.gov) or call 202-226-1965

To view a list of available fellowships, visit <https://cao.house.gov/gold-star>.



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# Gold Star Siblings: A Sister's Advocacy

by Lori Chapman Longfritz  
*Survivor Advocacy  
Council Representative*

The dust was literally settling after 9/11 as my brother, Air Force Combat Controller Master Sgt. John Chapman, was preparing for what would be a long campaign to bring the terrorists to justice. He didn't have to go but demanded to be put into rotation. During one of his last conversations with our sister, Tammy, John told her, "I will do everything in my power to protect my team." Ultimately, he not only protected them, he saved their lives, and then sacrificed his own for eighteen others who were part of an incoming Quick Reaction Force.

On March 4, 2002, our family was inducted into a group no one wants to join and from which there is no escape. I'll never forget how I found out: My stepfather called at 10 pm and I knew before answering that it wouldn't be good. No one called

me that late. I heard Mom screaming in the background and all he could say was, "It's your brother." I slammed the phone down, woke my daughter, and raced to their house where she collapsed in my arms. I then had to make the calls to Tammy and our brother, Kevin. Though I tried to convey the news gently, is there really a good way to do it? I did a horrible job. And just like that ... we were thrown into a world of questions and immeasurable pain; the same gut-wrenching agony suffered by everyone who gets "that call".

Over the past two decades since John's death, countless people and organizations have honored him in one way or another; from a private company rechristening a munitions ship as TSgt John A Chapman (he was posthumously promoted to Master Sgt. in 2018), to a complete stranger naming her new dog Sergeant



**Lori and her brother, MSgt John Chapman in 2001.**

Chapman so when people ask her, "Why Chapman?" she can tell them John's story.

What I slowly started to realize, especially in the past six years, is that anyone who is not the Primary Next of Kin (PNOK) isn't necessarily a priority to the Air Force at large, nor to specific Air Force groups. My big eyeopener was the run-up to John's Medal of Honor upgrade, the ceremony itself, and other events of that week. While I won't go into details, suffice it to say that even though we were all included in most events, it was clear we were considered "extended family" and, therefore, were treated as such by some Air Force personnel.

The experience left me searching for those who would know and understand my pain; the deep and everlasting grief of a sibling. I joined a social media Gold Star siblings group and discovered I was not alone. So many of their stories are far worse than

my own and we talked about the need for someone to stand up and say, "We exist and the depth of our loss is unfathomable." Grief is difficult enough without the added pain of exclusion, feeling left out, or being treated as though your loss isn't as deep as that of others.

Last year, I found hope through an organization to which I had never been introduced: Air Force Families Forever (AFFF). A Gold Star friend said the AFFF was seeking volunteers to join the second term of a new group created to address survivor concerns. He had been part of the first term of the Survivor's Advocacy Council (SAC). It is comprised of Gold Star siblings, parents, spouses, and children who, along with leadership support and a team leader, seek solutions to issues affecting each Gold Star group. I viewed the SAC as my opportunity to voice concerns specific to Gold Star siblings, so I applied and was chosen. My plan is to advocate for change that may lessen the anguish now being felt by so many and to ensure future Gold Star siblings never even have to experience it.

My heart breaks for the forgotten brothers and



**MSgt John Chapman on a mountain in Afghanistan, 2002.**

See **SISTER** on Page 7

# My Journey As A Surviving Father of Suicide

by CW3, USA Retired Jon W. Ganues  
*Surviving father and TAPS Survivor Care Associate*

My son, Jon Wesley Ganues, Jr. was an Airman First Class in the United States Air Force (USAF), serving as a Security Policeman at Moody Air Force base, when he died by suicide on June 2, 2009. Wesley, as we called him, was a very bright and happy young man, who had a wonderful future ahead of him in the military. He was born in Eschenbach, Germany in 1986 and spoke English and German as a toddler. Wesley's athletic abilities developed in high school, and he played football for his high school team. He possessed a beautiful smile and loved to have fun. He attended Liberty University for three years and played on a minor league football team near the university. After his third year of college, he got married to his high school sweetheart and decided to enter the military.

Wesley excelled in Basic Training and reported to his first duty station, Moody Air Force Base, Valdosta, Georgia. He enjoyed being a



A1C Jon Ganues Jr. Photo courtesy of Mr. Jon Ganues.

Security Policeman in the 822nd Security Forces Squadron. On June 2nd, 2009, five days before deploying to Camp Bucca, Iraq with his squadron, Wesley was involved in a domestic dispute and altercation with his wife, which resulted in him tragically ending his life with a firearm. Wesley's death was a hard blow to everyone who knew him and turned my life upside down. His commander wrote me a letter sharing how Wesley was a rising leader and about his athletic abilities. He also mentioned Wesley had been identified to go to Airborne and officer training schools. Wesley's military career had started to blossom, and opportunities were opening for him.

I found myself faced not only with his death, but also the stigma attached to suicide. His suicide raised questions, caused anger, guilt, and embarrassment for me. I pushed all of this down so I could care for my family and arrange for his return home and funeral services. As a man and retired Army Warrant Officer, it was easy for me to set aside my emotions to get things done. I held things together for my family and stood firm and strong. After his funeral and once everything settled down, I finally started to grieve, or so I thought.

I am an introvert by nature, so returning to work and the thought of facing people that would be asking me questions was overwhelming. My thoughts of isolation were strong but staying at home did not work for me as my mind kept focusing on tragedy. The deep feeling of embarrassment that my son had ended his life and the circumstances that led up to it were heavy on my mind. Consumed with these thoughts my grieving did not move forward. To my relief, those first few weeks back to work never materialized into anything dark as I had imagined. My coworkers gave me space and



Photo courtesy of Mr. Jon Ganues, Run for the Fallen event at Fort Lee, VA in 2016.

support beyond what I could have wanted. With that apprehension behind me, I was able to begin grieving.

As a surviving father of a military death, my journey to connect with others, especially men, was not a straight path. I did not live close to or work with any fathers who lost a child on active duty, much less to suicide. My wife and I attended a grief support group for a brief time at Fort Lee, Virginia, eventually meeting other fathers who had lost their sons in combat related deaths. The pain I felt was different from theirs, as was the conversation. It became uncomfortable hearing heroic stories of their sons after losing my own son to suicide. It became extremely hard to tell his story following one of theirs. They never said or did anything to offend me, in fact they were supportive, but it felt different.

The event that changed that forever was a Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) National Military Suicide Survivors seminar my wife and I attended in San Diego, California in October of 2012. It was at that event I found my people, those who knew the

See **JOURNEY** on Page 8



## ADVOCATE'S CORNER

By Randi Ramcharan

Department of the Air Force Gold Star and  
Surviving Family Member Representative

Nothing can prepare you for the unexpected loss of a loved one. You are grieving while managing overwhelming paperwork and decisions.

One of the things I am regularly contacted about are investigations. The Department of the Air Force will communicate with the next of kin if the Air Force is conducting an investigation into a death occurring on duty. Additionally, if the Air Force is investigating the case, the next of kin should receive information on how to file a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for a properly redacted copy of the finished report. This is important information for the families to receive but many do not know

how to obtain it.

If you never submitted a FOIA request for the Air Force investigation regarding your loved one, there is no time limitation on when you can request it. Please know that the report will be redacted in accordance with the law to protect such things as the privacy of other individuals, confidential sources (which sometimes includes local law enforcement agencies who have not authorized the Air Force to release their information), and investigative tradecraft. In some cases, involving child subjects, victims, or witnesses, the law prohibits release of even a redacted copy of the case file.

If the Air Force Office

of Special Investigations (OSI) conducted the investigation, the best place to start is by filing a FOIA request with them and you can find all the details here: <https://www.osi.af.mil/afosifolia/>. If the Department of the Air Force did not have jurisdiction over the investigation for your loved one, or if another law enforcement agency was also involved, you should reach out directly to those other agencies to request information. It's important to know that the FOIA only applies to federal agencies, but many states have their own laws that apply to getting information like police and autopsy reports. The best way to ensure you're getting as

much information as you can is to work directly with those entities.

If the Armed Forces Medical Examiner conducted the autopsy, you can also request the autopsy report and/or photos. The request form, titled "Request for Autopsy Report and Supplemental Information", may be found here: Armed Forces Medical Examiner System | Health.mil. Your Air Force Families Forever contact may also assist you with submitting this request.

I want to close by recommending that, if you do request the investigation or autopsy, you also let your support network know you will be receiving this information. When you receive it, have that support network with you when you open it – the information in the reports may be difficult to see and read. This can include family, friends, mentors, religious leaders, counselors, etc.

If you need assistance with finding support, please reach out to your Air Force Families Forever contact and they will work with you to find the resource you need.

## SISTER Continued from Page 5

sisters who have come before me and those who have walked with me, but the future brings a new awareness that would not be happening without siblings sharing their stories and bravely saying, "We exist." They don't want to feel invisible any longer. And the Air Force is listening. They established the Air Force Families Forever, a long-term survivor program designed to provide support to family members, no matter how long ago their loss was. It is a resource I wish I had known about years ago. Connecting with them and identifying yourself is a great first step in avoiding the pain of being forgotten. The AFFF was established to help all family of deceased service members. In order to address specific concerns, the AFFF created the Survivor's Advocacy Council. It is through the AFFF and the SAC that siblings will be heard. You are not alone.

We need to speak up, tell our stories, and give them time to assess and address. Together, through our willingness to share, listen and collaborate, we can lessen or eliminate unnecessary pain for future Gold Star siblings.



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## JOURNEY Continued from Page 6

pain, heartache, and stigma of a suicide death in a family. My new tribe did not judge, pity, forsake, shame, ignore, or look down on me. They fully supported and lifted me up, embracing me with love and understanding as only a suicide survivor could. They understood our pain, they understood us.

As I attended more TAPS events and spent even more time with my male peers I started on a positive path of grieving and post traumatic growth. I started connecting more to men of all of losses,

realizing that our grief was indeed similar.

Our stories and relationships differed, but as men our grief ran parallel to each other's. I would come to realize that men and women grieve differently. This was especially important, as it explained why there were so many disconnects between us. Men and the bonding they do together is unique and coupled with grieving allows them to have their emotional moments in a supportive environment. A place where there is no judgement,

mockery for crying, criticism for cussing. This is what allowed me to have post traumatic growth, enabling me to grieve in a healthy way. On my journey I began to realize that I was developing into a role model for other men. It was their words of thanks that led me to become a TAPS Peer Mentor, serving others out of my own tragedy.

Men who are grieving should seek out organizations and groups that have programs tailored to connect them to their peers in a safe environment. This allows

them to be vulnerable, open, themselves and communicate their feelings. For men it is important to know it is okay to be angry, it is okay to be sad, and it is okay to not be okay. When men can safely take off their armor, hang it up, they can begin to work on their grief. Men have a right and a need to grieve, just like everyone else. To learn more about male specific programming offered through TAPS, visit <https://www.taps.org/events/?tag=Mens+Program>.

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# Happy New Year!

## 2023



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## U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: Office Of Survivor Assistance

WASHINGTON, DC—The Office of Survivors Assistance (OSA) was established by Public Law 110-389, Title II, Section 222, in October 2008, to serve as a resource regarding all benefits and services furnished by the Department to Survivors and Dependents of deceased Veterans and members of the Armed Forces. OSA also serves as a principal advisor to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and promotes the use of VA benefits, programs and services to survivors.

### HELPFUL LINKS:

Office of Survivors Assistance FAQs, <https://www.va.gov/SURVIVORS/FAQs.asp>

Application Forms and Information, [https://www.va.gov/opa/personal/dependent\\_survivor.asp](https://www.va.gov/opa/personal/dependent_survivor.asp)

Beneficiary Financial Counseling Services and Online Will Preparation, <https://benefits.va.gov/insurance/bfcs.asp>

Bereavement Counseling for Surviving Family Members, [https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement\\_Counseling.asp](https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement_Counseling.asp)

(Courtesy of the Veteran Affairs, Office of Survivors Assistance)

