



North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:
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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

Thank you for your consideration of HB 1182. This bill would create a reimbursement fund for Veteran Service Organizations that provide one of the services of a military veteran's funeral. Currently the Department of the Army has a reimbursement of \$50 if a VSO plays a live bugle at a funeral. There aren't many live buglers in the state anymore. During my time as a team leader of the Military Funeral Honors program I covered the northwest part of the state from Rugby to Montana, and McClusky and Watford City to Canada. I have presented flags to cameras, the lone attendee that had coffee with the veteran, and numerous funeral directors when there was nobody in attendance. I had 3 live buglers in the entire area. The only constant, aside from a funeral director, was the Veteran Organizations that sometimes had just a handful of guys to render a 3 volley salute. More often than not, my partner or I would play a high quality recording of TAPS that was inserted into a bugle. What this bill proposes is to create a \$50 reimbursement for a VSO that does one of the five parts of a veterans funeral. The 5 parts are the folding of the US Flag, presentation of the US Flag, presentation of the ND State Coin, playing of TAPS, and the 3 volley Salute. Only one VSO can claim this reimbursement and the intent is that they would first attempt to get the federal reimbursement. If they do receive that they wouldn't be able to get the state reimbursement.

To put this into numerical terms, its estimated that 60% of all military funerals in ND are Army veterans and out of those only about 30% had a live bugle to qualify for the Federal reimbursement. Each branch does their own funerals and the ND Army National Guard averages about 765 funerals a year. Using those numbers, we are estimating about 1275 veteran funerals a year. Keep in mind that we can expect rise and falls that correlate with the gaps between major wars where our military numbers rose and fell. We came in on the high side with our ask of \$200,000 and we would understand a reduction if the committee felt that was necessary. The Department of Veteran Affairs has identified an existing fund that this money could be deposited and they would create the rules and process for reimbursement.

I hope you will approve this new program. This is a small amount that will go a long ways to maintain uniforms, help with travel costs and to maintain equipment. These services for veteran funerals are important to provide closure to the family and the final honors to the veteran. I respectfully ask for a Do Pass recommendation from the committee.