

TESTIMONY OF
BRIGADIER GENERAL JACKIE HUBER
NORTH DAKOTA NATIONAL GUARD
BEFORE THE
SENATE AGRICULTURE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
14 FEBRUARY 2025
HOUSE BILL 1076

Chairman Luick and members of the committee, for the record I am Jackie Huber, the Deputy Adjutant General of the North Dakota National Guard. I am here today to testify in support of HB 1076. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important matter today. First, I want to express sincere gratitude to the North Dakota Legislature for establishing the \$15,000 death gratuity during the 67th Legislative Session. This benefit has been an essential step in recognizing and supporting families who lose a loved one serving on State Active-Duty. It reflects North Dakota's commitment to our service members and their families, honoring the sacrifices they make to protect and serve our communities.

However, I urge the committee to consider increasing this benefit to \$100,000 to align it with the federal death gratuity and better support families in their time of greatest need. When we look at other states, many have taken steps to increase their death gratuities for State Active-Duty deaths to amounts that better reflect the cost of living and the financial burdens families face. For instance, Texas and New Mexico, offer \$500,000 for service members who die in the line of duty, while some states like California, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Mississippi, and Pennsylvania provide \$100,000, while other states provide less and in some cases none. Raising North Dakota's gratuity to \$100,000 would keep us in line with these and other states. Some states have language that a "death gratuity payment equal to the amount allowed for service members in a federal active service status."

Increasing this benefit not only provides crucial financial relief but also brings our state benefit in line with the federal death gratuity of \$100,000. This amount helps families address immediate needs, including funeral expenses, mortgage payments, and the costs associated with an abrupt loss of household income. For a grieving family, a \$15,000 benefit is significant, but it doesn't come close to meeting the needs that arise following such a tragedy. An increase to \$100,000 would provide families with the stability they need to manage these challenges.

Moreover, raising this gratuity honors the full extent of the service our National Guard and other military members provide to North Dakota. Whether called to serve in federal missions abroad or state missions here at home, these individuals face real risks and make tremendous sacrifices. Aligning this benefit with the federal amount demonstrates that North Dakota values their service equally, regardless of mission type.

Finally, increasing the gratuity could strengthen our National Guard by enhancing retention and recruitment efforts. Knowing that their families would be fully supported in the event of a tragedy provides reassurance to service members and their loved ones. This measure would reinforce our commitment to support those who stand ready to serve at a moment's notice.

In conclusion, I urge this committee to raise the State Active-Duty Death Gratuity to \$100,000, aligning it with federal standards and matching the support other states provide. Thank you for considering this important matter and for continuing to honor the service and sacrifices of our North Dakota service members and their families.

Thank you and I will stand for questions.