



Testimony on House Bill 459
Sponsor: Representative Ed Lieser
Before House State Administration Committee
Room 455

Title: A bill for an act entitled: An act allowing a state veterans' home to admit parents of veterans who died while serving; amending sections 10-2-410 and 10-2-403, MCA, and providing an immediate effective date."

My name is Kelly Williams; I am the Administrator of the Senior and Long Term Care Division in the Department of Public Health and Human Services. The Senior and Long Term Care Division, provides oversight and management for the two state veterans homes in Montana that provide nursing facility services to veterans.

Purpose of the Legislation:

This legislation will allow parents of a veteran who died while serving in the Armed Forces to be considered for admission to one of the two state veterans' homes. These parents are commonly referred to as Gold Star parents. This is a term dating back to the Civil War era and refers to mothers and fathers who have lost a child during military service.

Currently, spouses or surviving spouses of veterans may be admitted to one of the veteran's homes if space is available. This would add Gold Star parents to those who may be considered for admission.

By way of background, Montana has two long term care facilities dedicated to the care of veterans: The Montana Veterans Home in Columbia Falls and Eastern Montana Veterans Home in Glendive.

The Montana Veterans Home (MVH) in Columbia Falls was established in 1896 and is a one hundred five (105) bed licensed and certified skilled nursing facility, which includes a 15 bed special care unit for Alzheimer or dementia care. In addition to the nursing facility, MVH operates a twelve (12) bed domiciliary unit. The "Dom" provides supervision and assistance in a residential setting to Veterans who are able to meet their own self-care needs.

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As of July 2014, the facility was home for 112 veterans and their spouses, including 100 nursing facility residents and 12 residents in the Dom. Ninety-six residents are male, 16 are female, and 14 are the spouses of veterans.

Eastern Montana Veterans Home (EMVH) in Glendive was built in 1994 and opened its doors for admissions on July 17, 1995. The Senior and Long Term Care Division (SLTCD) has contracted for the day to day operation and management of the EMVH facility since its opening. It provides 80 skilled and intermediate nursing facility beds, including 16 beds dedicated to Alzheimer or dementia care residents. As of July 2014 the facility was home to 64 veterans. Forty-seven residents were male, and 17 were female.

Montana veterans may be admitted to either facility. If they are over 55 years of age, or in need of care, and have had active service in the armed forces. Spouses or surviving spouses of veterans may also be admitted if space is available.

For purposes of payment, these parents would be treated in the same manner as spouses of veterans, which means they are considered private pay patients. There is a federal limit that no more than 25% of the beds in any facility are allowed to be filled with non-veterans, so it is expected that a minimal number of parents would be admitted with this change.

Veterans would continue to have a priority for admission to either facility over non veterans when there is a waiting list for admission to either facility.

This bill while not significant in its impact for increased admissions it is clearly symbolic in its recognition of the losses felt by parents who have had a child die while serving in the Armed Forces. This measure provides those parents an option to seek admission and receive nursing facility services in a state veteran's home should they need nursing facility services and if there is availability in the facility.

The Department of Public Health and Human Services requests your support of House Bill 459.

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