

Benefits for the Family of a Fallen Soldier

Assistance from military personnel

The military will assign a casualty assistance officer to work with the family for a National Guard member, probably a person from the Minnesota Department of Military Affairs. That person contacts the family in person immediately following the soldier's death. The military casualty assistance officer will help the family to make arrangements for the funeral and the honor guard, and to apply for all military benefits at the appropriate time.

Local veterans organizations are available to assist, at the family's discretion.

General benefits

The following benefits are available to the family of a Minnesota soldier who dies while in active military service.

- A military honor guard at the soldier's funeral and/or burial (arranged by funeral home and military casualty assistance officer)
- An American flag to cover the soldier's coffin (federal benefit; by funeral director)
- Free burial in a national cemetery (Fort Snelling or any national cemetery, except Arlington) or at the Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery at Little Falls
- A bronze-star grave marker (from the state)
- Any remaining military pay for the month
- A \$12,000 death gratuity payment from the military (not taxable, since late 2004)
- Eligible for Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI) (up to \$250,000, depending on whatever level the soldier has contracted for and paid premiums)
- The soldier's surviving spouse would be eligible for Death Indemnity Compensation (a monthly payment, no longer depending on rank, to the surviving spouse for life, irrespective of the soldier's rank or the recipient's income). This benefit terminates if the surviving spouse remarries within ten years.

Education benefits If the soldier had any dependent children, those dependent children would qualify to attend any Minnesota public higher educational institution tuition-free (except the University of Minnesota system). This state benefit includes any legally adopted children, but not foster children.

The soldier's surviving spouse and dependent children are eligible to attend any public or private higher educational institution and receive a monthly stipend from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The dependent children can also receive this benefit while attending high school.

County veterans service officer The county veteran service officer (the CVSO, of any county in the state) can help the family apply for all state and federal veterans benefits, both immediately and over the months and years following the death of the soldier, as benefit laws and each survivor's situation changes.

If the family has an immediate financial crisis at the time of the soldier's death or at any time thereafter, the CVSO can help the family apply for a grant from the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs State Soldiers Assistance Fund for immediate financial assistance (of up to \$1,000 or more, depending upon family size and need) for daily living expenses. The local CVSO can be found in the local phone book under county government listings.

For more information: Contact legislative analyst Jim Cleary at 651-296-5053.

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