

# U.S. Rep. Steil: Introduces Veterans Survivor Benefits Fairness Act, honors Wisconsin family

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**GREENDALE, WI** - Today, Congressman Bryan Steil (WI-01) announced the introduction of H.R. 1609, the Survivor Benefits Fairness Act, at a press conference in Greendale, Wisconsin. The legislation would ensure the VA cannot demand families of beneficiaries pay back their monthly benefits in the event of a surviving spouse's death. Steil's office was contacted by a constituent who received notice from the VA to return survivor benefit payments.



Steil Speaks at Press Conference with Ann Hessil from Franklin

## [VIDEO & PHOTOS FROM CONFERENCE](#)

“Each of our veterans and their families deserve the benefits they have fought for and earned. There is an unfair law hurting our veterans, and we must fix it,” **said Congressman Steil**. “Today, it was great to be joined by Ann Hessil and veterans to announce the introduction of this legislation. I’m committed to getting this important piece of legislation across the finish line.”

“If a veteran passes away, their spouse should not be forced to pay back VA benefits that have already been paid out to support the veteran and their family,” **said Congressman Pappas**. “This bipartisan legislation would make an important change to VA rules to ensure that no mourning family is asked to pay back benefits. I’m honored to introduce this important bipartisan bill alongside Congressman Steil and will continue pushing for changes at VA to properly honor the service of all our veterans and their families.”

## **Background:**

Steil introduced H.R. 1609 with support from Congressman Chris Pappas (D-NH). On October 19, 2021, Congressman Bryan Steil's office received a call from Ann Hessil, a constituent from Wisconsin's First District, regarding a letter she had received from the VA. The VA was requesting Ms. Hessil pay back her mother's survivor benefits for the month which she had passed, after these benefits had been used for that month's rent, utilities, and other needs. Steil immediately jumped into action, checking to see if the VA required these benefits to be back-paid, ultimately to find out the VA's policy, a law created by Congress, required the monthly benefit of a survivor's death to be repaid to the VA.

The Survivor Benefits Fairness Act seeks to undue this law by ensuring the VA cannot demand the families of beneficiaries pay back their monthly benefit in the event of a surviving spouse's death.

To read a one-pager about the bill, click [HERE](#).

To read the full text of the legislation, click [HERE](#).

For media who were unable to attend the press conference, you can access photos and video from the event [HERE](#).