

## Arlington National Cemetery--Upcoming Bill Would Preserve Your Earned Benefit

As lawmakers work to complete legislation designed to transform a VA-run facility into the “next Arlington National Cemetery” – a location able to continue an earned benefit MOAA and other advocates have long fought to protect – one such cemetery is seeking feedback on a proposed name change designed to increase its visibility among veterans.

MOAA and The Military Coalition’s engagement with elected officials and VA leaders over proposed eligibility restrictions at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) have prompted thoughts on how to preserve benefits as ANC reaches capacity. Draft legislation supported by majority and minority members of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs would transform an existing VA-run national cemetery into one continuing the DoD tradition of full military honors.

Preserving this benefit remains one of MOAA’s key legislative priorities and an important issue for The Military Coalition, a group of organizations representing nearly 5.5 million members of the uniformed services community. Along with opposing proposed eligibility changes which would discriminate against veterans by service type, bar nearly all women veterans from ANC, and fails to continue the benefit for elderly veterans with end-of-life plans already in place, MOAA recommends Congress, with support from the VA and DoD, pass legislation to transform a VA run cemetery into the next ANC as it reaches capacity in order to maintain the full military honors benefit.

At <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11362> the Congressional Research Service defense primer on ANC explains the proposed eligibility changes. As these gears begin to turn, the VA has asked for MOAA’s feedback on a proposed name change for Quantico National Cemetery (QNC) in Triangle, Va. – a site run by the VA’s National Cemetery Administration (NCA) with 597.3 undeveloped acres conducting 1,400 burials each year.

The new name would “better promote the location of this national cemetery and the veteran burial benefit,” according to the VA’s message to MOAA. “Given its current name, the public may believe the cemetery is limited to Marine Corps interments only. Therefore, NCA’s proposed renaming will ensure the public is aware of the availability of Quantico National Cemetery to eligible veterans while identifying its location in the greater Washington, D.C., National Capital Region as well as near the Marine Corps Base Quantico.” Your feedback is important. MOAA asks readers to let them know what you think about the proposed name change via email at [legis2@moaa.org](mailto:legis2@moaa.org) . By law, the name must retain “Quantico” in some form. NCA has proposed six options:

- National Cemetery of the Capital Region at Quantico
- National Memorial Cemetery at Quantico
- Quantico - Capital Region National Cemetery
- Capital Region – Quantico National Cemetery
- United States Capital Region Cemetery at Quantico
- Northern Virginia National Cemetery at Quantico

Making more veterans aware of the existence of, and services available at, the Quantico site is far from the only communications issue faced by DoD and VA officials on this topic: Older veterans, dependents, and surviving spouses are frustrated with understanding the difference between VA- and DoD-run cemeteries. The proposed eligibility reductions at ANC intend to force many to change plans, with many elderly veterans unaware they will lose the benefit. DoD has interpreted the FY 2019 National Defense Authorization Act as a directive to reduce eligibility for ANC to keep it operational. Without congressional intervention, the change in eligibility puts the burden of a solution on the currently eligible servicemembers and their families — including those who have long had ANC as their plan for final rest.

And the proposed change won't solve the problem: Eventually, ANC will reach capacity. But there's time to act — with current eligibility standards, ANC is not projected to reach capacity until sometime after 2060. There's no need to kick the can farther down the road. The planned eligibility reduction communicates a poor message to those who have served and those now in uniform. By limiting interment to those with the Purple Heart or Silver Star and above, it discriminates against past, present, and future servicemembers who face danger at sea, in the air, in space, operating strategic nuclear forces, or fighting a pandemic at a medical facility. The proposal also will render countless Vietnam-era veterans and nearly all female veterans ineligible.

There are currently 155 VA-run national cemeteries, with many adjacent to a military installation. Transforming an existing national cemetery into the next ANC that affords full military honors will preserve this benefit and honor the intent for our veterans. Lawmakers will introduce a bipartisan and bicameral bill soon. You can continue to monitor updates and find a call to action with a bill number, once we have it, via MOAA's Advocacy News page at <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/news-listing> .