

Senator Susan M. Collins
Statement on NDAA/Military Widow's Tax Repeal
December 17, 2019

Mr. President, I'm delighted to join my friend and colleague from Alabama, Senator Jones, to urge support for the final passage of the *National Defense Authorization Act*, which finally contains repeal of what is commonly called the military widow's tax. I want to commend Chairman Inhofe and Ranking Member Reed for including this important provision in the bill and for their excellent job in crafting the legislation overall. This significant bill contains numerous provisions critical to our national security and important to the great State of Maine. But right now, I want to join my colleague, Senator Jones, in celebrating and highlighting one long-fought-for provision, and that is the repeal of the Survivor Benefit Plan Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset, commonly referred to as the military widow's tax.

Let me explain exactly what the problem is. Many military retirees purchase, with their own money, a form of insurance called the Survivor Benefit Plan. If they subsequently die of a military-connected illness, they qualify or their surviving spouse qualifies for a Dependency and Indemnity Compensation benefit from the VA. Unfortunately, these two programs are offset dollar-for-dollar for our military families. This makes no sense. The retirees are paying for this extra insurance with their own money. The NDAA will finally remedy this inequity, this burdensome unfairness. It will permit as many as 67,000 surviving spouses, including more than 260 in Maine, to begin collecting the full survivor benefits they are entitled to once it is fully phased-in. The average offset to SBP amounts to more than \$11,000 per year, which is a significant amount of money that a widow or widower needs to help support their families and themselves.

I'd like to again recognize and thank Senator Jones for his strong advocacy and unceasing leadership, as well as the countless military spouses and veteran advocates and service organizations that helped push this effort over the finish line this year. This year these dedicated advocates helped Senator Jones and I secure a record number of cosponsors to our bill to repeal the widow's tax—78 Senators and 383 House members. As Senator Jones was just mentioning, this is phenomenal. It shows the strong bipartisan support to correct this unfairness.

Often I am reminded by military commanders of the saying that you “recruit the soldier,” but you “retain the family.” We have an obligation to make sure that we are taking care of our military families that have sacrificed so much.

I urge all of our colleagues to support the final passage of the NDAA, and to finally put an end to the military widow's tax.

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