

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 28, 2019

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chairman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
128 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
2083 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Fleischmann
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
2410 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Capito, Chairwoman Roybal-Allard, and Ranking Members Tester and Fleischmann:

As you prepare the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Homeland Security Appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you provide for the payment of death gratuities for survivors of deceased Coast Guard members in the event of any future government shutdown.

The longstanding purpose of the death gratuity payment is to assist families of deceased servicemembers in meeting their financial needs during the period immediately following a loved one's death and before other survivor benefits become available. We were disturbed to hear that families of Coast Guard members killed in action during a government shutdown would be denied the death benefits they were promised. In light of this injustice, we believe Congress should take action to safeguard grieving Coast Guard families.

In 2018, the *Families of Fallen Servicemembers First Act* was introduced to provide death gratuities for servicemembers of the other branches of the military during a government shutdown. The legislation secured more than 200 bipartisan and bicameral cosponsors and the support of nearly two dozen veteran service organizations. In light of that broad support and with the help of the Appropriations Committees, the legislation was incorporated into Section 8136 of the FY2019 Department of Defense Appropriations bill.

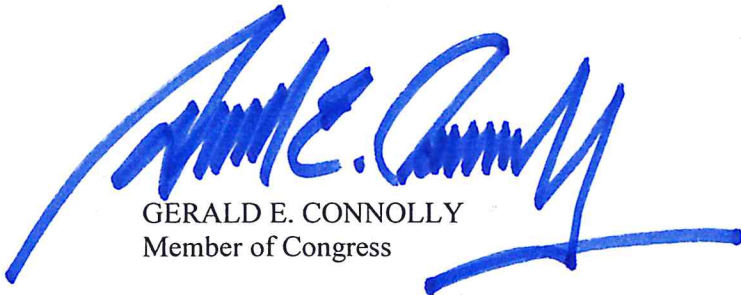
Sec. 8136. Amounts appropriated for "Defense Health Program" in this Act and hereafter may be obligated to make death gratuity payments, as authorized in subchapter II of chapter 75 of title 10, United States Code, if no appropriation for "Military Personnel" is available for obligation for such payments: Provided, That such obligations may subsequently be recorded against appropriations available for "Military Personnel".

However, this provision did not cover the Coast Guard, which is funded through the Homeland Security bill. We respectfully request that you include the language below in the FY2020 Homeland Security bill.

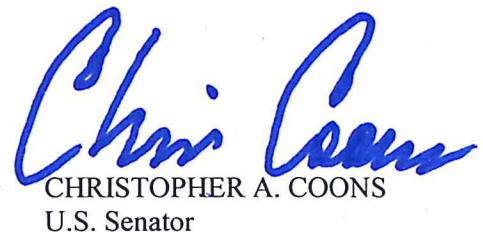
Amounts appropriated for "Retired Pay" in this Act and hereafter may be obligated to make death gratuity payments, as authorized in subchapter II of chapter 75 of title 10, United States Code, if no appropriation for "Military Pay and Allowances" is available for obligation for such payments: Provided, That such obligations may subsequently be recorded against appropriations available for "Military Personnel".

These benefits should never be subject to government inaction. We must ensure that our nation always meets its sacred obligation to the families of our fallen servicemembers. We urge your support for funding Coast Guard death gratuities during government shutdowns in the FY2020 Homeland Security Appropriations bill. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



GERALD E. CONNOLLY
Member of Congress

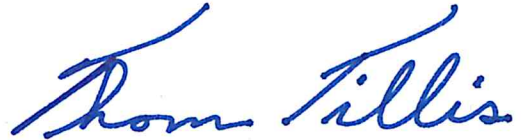


CHRISTOPHER A. COONS
U.S. Senator



BRIAN FITZPATRICK

BRIAN FITZPATRICK
Member of Congress



THOM TILLIS

THOM TILLIS
U.S. Senator