

**Unemployment Insurance Benefits for Individuals whose active duty military spouse is killed in  
Combat**

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony concerning the eligibility of unemployment benefits for individuals whose active duty military spouse is killed in combat. I am Bridgette Van Dusen, widow of CW3 Brian K. Van Dusen, killed in Samarra, Iraq on May 9, 2003. He was killed while evading enemy fire during a mission to medically evacuate an Iraqi child that stepped on a land mine.

I have been a family member of the military since the day I was born. I am very familiar with the sacrifices made by the spouse of a soldier. I grew up watching my mother start a job and quit them due to changes in my father's career. My family often struggled to make ends meet.

After becoming a military spouse in 1996, I continued my education. I completed my bachelor degree in addition to one year of schooling to become a board certified medical technologist. I was determined to have a career that was in high demand no matter where my husband's career should take me.

I gained exceptional employment at Penrose Hospital in Colorado Springs in February 2002. My husband was killed in action in May 2003. At that time, my life was turned upside down. My children's lives were turned upside down. I had NO idea what my future would hold. I was afraid for my financial future. I had a 6 year old and a 2 year old to finish raising ALONE.

My employer graciously allowed me to take as much time off as I needed. However, I only had approximately one week of paid time off. I did not return to work for 3 months. During that time, I went home—to Kansas. My entire family was there for me to lean on and to help me with my young children.

Why did I return to Colorado? I returned to Colorado because I was a homeowner and had financial security with my current employer. Moving "home" was not an option for me.

During my first year as a widow, I was able to get all my financial matters in order. I quit my job in September 2004. I did NOT quit my job to "relocate" or "move home". I quit to help my children recover from losing their father. My then 7 year old daughter was suicidal. My son, who was only 3 years old, had been kick out of 3 daycare centers for behavioral issues. Now 5 years later, we are still in therapy.

My children may have grieved the loss of their father differently had I moved "home". They would have had constant love and support from family members. However, at that time the uncertainty of my family's financial future kept me in Colorado—gainfully employed.

I have been very fortunate. Unlike many widows, I have been able to put my career on hold for my children. Not all surviving spouses have that opportunity. Although many of us receive the same benefits, the amounts can vary greatly based on a soldier's time in service, the amount invested into Social Security, and how life insurance was distributed.

Many surviving spouses continue working to provide for their children. As single parents of grieving children, it is very important for us to provide a safe and nurturing environment for our children. Some of us may accomplish this by moving closer to family and friends. Others chose to find a new job or career that is better suited for raising a grieving family.

I believe that ALL surviving families would benefit from having this bill passed. If not benefitting from collecting unemployment insurance benefits, at least a surviving spouse would have another option available. This would be an option that would allow for better choices in raising and providing for a family. Who knows where I would be today, had I stayed in Kansas with my family instead of returning to my career in Colorado?