

Creating a “Survivor’s File”

Whether your marriage was in the early days of military service or long after retirement, one of the most difficult situations you’ll face is dealing with the death of your retired military spouse. Nothing can make this mission easy, but being prepared can help ensure that you do what you need to when the time comes. A file with all the Veteran’s important papers won’t help if it’s in an unlabeled file drawer or on a computer protected with a password that you don’t have. Similarly, funeral wishes can’t be followed if the cemetery selected has since closed to new burials.

Survivor’s files at a minimum will need your Social Security Number and copy of your DD-214. Make sure your survivor’s file includes information on any VA payment or claim you’ve filed with the VA. Include a copy of your latest Retiree Account Statement and highlight the section that shows if you did or did not enroll in SBP and, if you did enroll, what category of beneficiary you enrolled (for example, spouse or former spouse). Do you have life insurance? Include a copy of your policy and current information on where to call. Note that your spouse needs to get a new ID card and notify the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) (1-800-538-9552) of your death. Your will - Where is it? If you were married before, are any benefits going to your former spouse and children?

Upon death, survivors will need to contact the Defense Finance and Accounting Service’s Retired Pay Center (1-800-321-1080) for those receiving military retired pay. For those receiving VA disability compensation, they’ll need to contact the Department of Veterans Affairs (1-800-827-1000). You should also contact the local Social Security office. Our office can assist with these matters. We can also assist the survivors in applying for VA benefits they may be eligible for.

There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To find out if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can also get information on the web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office website at www.countyofkings.com.

Joe Wright, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 West Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230, the phone number is 582-3211 ex. 2662 or email joe.wright@co.kings.ca.us.