WASHINGTON, DC - Last night, Congressman Steny Hoyer signed a petition to force the full House of Representatives to consider H.R. 548, the Survivor Benefits Improvement Act; a bipartisan proposal to immediately end the benefit reduction received by a veteran's spouse when they turn 62 and protect the retirement benefits earned by military retirees.

As a result of the Republican leadership's refusal to take up the Survivor Benefits Improvement Act, this petition is the only way to get this measure considered. Even though it has 306 cosponsors in the House - both Republicans and Democrats - the Republican leadership has failed to schedule the measure for a vote. If the discharge petition gets 218 signatures, the House of Representatives would consider the measure under the discharge rule.

There are approximately 6,325 survivors in Maryland who receive annuities through the Survivor Benefit Program. Currently, the program penalizes 5,157 (81%) of these participants who are over 62 and are therefore only earning 35% of their annuity. Thousands of military retirees in Maryland pay premiums for years and anticipate that upon their death, their spouse will receive 55 percent of their benefit. But when their spouse reaches 62, the benefit drops to a mere 35 percent - forcing these widows to give up more than one-third of their retirement benefit when they are eligible for Social Security benefits. This reduction takes place even if the amount of their new Social Security benefits and the reduced military retirement benefit combined is less than the total survivor benefit they were promised.

"I join my Democratic colleagues in calling on the Republican leadership to end the Survivor Benefit Penalty and to keep their promise to military retirees by providing the retirement benefits to their families that they earned serving our country. By denying surviving spouses the full benefit they were promised, we are unfairly penalizing widows and spouses when they turn 62," said Congressman Hoyer. "The dramatic and overwhelming support for this bill demands that we invest in the programs which our veterans and their families not only deserve, but that their nation promised as a demonstration of our gratitude for answering freedom's call."

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