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By Sarah Palermo

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U.S. Rep. Charlie Bass held a press conference in the state Legislative Office Building this morning to announce legislation he sponsored in Washington to expand the boundary around and prevent protesters from interfering with military funerals.

The Sanctity of Eternal Rest for Veterans - or SERVE - Act would increase the quiet time before and after military funerals from one hour to two hours, and increase the buffer zones around funerals and access routes to them.

"The brave men and women who have fought and died for our country deserve the greatest dignity and respect, and their families deserve to be able to grieve in peace," Bass said.

The legislation was inspired by a 2007 New Hampshire law, enacted after religious protesters from the fervently anti-gay Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas protested at the funeral for an Army captain from Hampstead, Bass said.

The group uses military funerals to protest American tolerance for homosexuals.

Several state lawmakers and leaders of veterans groups joined Bass at the event, as well as members of the Patriot Guard, who ride motorcycles around the perimeter of military funerals to keep out protesters. Jean Durgin of Henniker, whose son Russell Durgin was killed in Afghanistan in 2006, also spoke.

"I know the pain and agony of laying a child to rest after his service," Durgin said, her voice small as she choked back tears.

"I would like to think this is not necessary, that there would be common decency in the world," she said, before turning her attention and anger to the protesters. "My son put on a uniform and raised his hand to protect your freedom of speech. You thank him by insulting him? . . . Your mother didn't raise you well."