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Buffers around military funerals will be increased

By Rep. Charlie Bass

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This Memorial Day, as Granite Staters come together to honor those who served our country and the cause for freedom, we remember those who have sacrificed for our nation, and we resolve to honor them the other 364 days of the year.

As the representative of New Hampshire's 2nd District in Congress, I have had the opportunity to meet many of the selfless men and women who have donned the uniform to keep us free. Whether it's at my regular veterans advisory board roundtables, events or other meetings, every veteran or service member I speak to shares the same commitment to and passion for serving a cause greater than themselves - a commitment that is shared by their families, too.

It's not only the service member who serves in the armed forces; it is the entire family. The sacrifices they must make while their loved one is deployed are immeasurable.

Sadly, some families have had to make the ultimate sacrifice as they lose a loved one in service to our nation. The brave men and women who have fought and died for our country deserve the greatest respect, both in life and in death, and their families and friends deserve to be able to grieve for their loved ones in peace.

It is the duty of our nation to ensure that we protect their right to mourn peacefully and without the disrespectful interference of unruly protesters.

That's why, after consultations with members of New Hampshire veterans' and military communities, last year I introduced bipartisan legislation, the Sanctity of Eternal Rest for Veterans (SERVE) Act (H.R. 1591), which will limit disruptions at military funerals by amending existing law to increase the buffer zone around services. The bill does not prohibit protesting and still protects individuals' First Amendment rights.

As a mother of a fallen serviceman from New Hampshire once told me, one of the best things her family did was to have Patriot Guard Riders stand ground at her son's funeral, allowing the family to honor and respect their loved one in peace. While we all wish this type of legislation wasn't necessary, we hope to give the fallen and their families the respect they deserve.

Last month, I was reminded once again why I introduced this legislation as I watched the unveiling of the Gold Star Mothers memorial in Manchester's Stanton Park to the public. While nothing can ease the pain of losing a loved one to war, the memorial is a fitting tribute to the mothers of New Hampshire's fallen soldiers, and a reminder of the true cost of freedom.

Let's honor those Gold Star Mothers, and other military families across the country, by ensuring they can mourn in peace as they lay a loved one to rest.

As we participate in parades, ceremonies and other remembrances this weekend to honor heroes from conflicts past and present, please take a moment to join me in thanking their families and friends for the sacrifices they, too, have made to protect our freedoms and keep us safe and secure.

(Republican Rep. Charlie Bass represents New Hampshire's 2nd District in Congress.)