

Dear Chairman Azzinaro and Esteemed Members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee,

I would like to express my strong support for House Bill H 7679 as it comes before you today for your consideration. This bill is designed to put Rhode Island in compliance with already passed Federal guidelines allowing for the burial of Hmong/Laotian Special Guerrilla Unit (SGU) veterans in state cemeteries which accept federal funds.

As it has now been over 50 years since the end of the War in Southeast Asia, many in our society today are not aware of the history and sacrifices of that time period. The SGU who fought loyally and faithfully on our behalf in that bitter conflict have generally been afforded no benefits whatsoever for having cast their lot with us and losing their homes, and country, for having done so. Their heroic sacrifices in fighting on our side saved many American lives by conducting interdictions along the North Vietnamese supply routes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, rescuing downed American pilots, and direct combat against highly trained North Vietnamese regular army units. Those who managed to escape the communist re-education camps after the War and get resettled here have become an important part of our American fabric, contributing greatly to the diversity of our society and this great experiment known as The United States of America.

The least the State of Rhode Island can do is afford the few remaining SGU veterans residing here the right to an honorable burial in our beautiful veterans cemetery in Exeter by passing H 7679. I became involved in this cause about four years ago at the behest of Senator Sheldon Whitehouse when no other veterans organization would afford deceased SGU veterans an honor detail because they weren't issued an "official" DD 214. My organization, Vietnam Veterans of America, has so far put together as best we could for four deceased SGU veterans, an honor guard which included folding the American flag over their caskets. I don't think it is too much of an ask for the State to now shoulder with pride this responsibility.

When she wrote the Veterans Column in the Providence Journal a few years back, Mary Talbot interviewed the late head monk at the Wat Lao Buddhovath Temple in Smithfield. I am including that interview as part of my testimony.

Sincerely,

Brian A Carn

Vice-President

Rhode Island State Council

Vietnam Veterans of America