

ARMY BOARD FOR CORRECTION OF MILITARY RECORDS

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

IN THE CASE OF: [REDACTED]

BOARD DATE: 23 January 2024

DOCKET NUMBER: AR20230015110

APPLICANT REQUESTS:

- correction of her deceased husband's records to show the line-of-duty (LOD) determination was completed prior to 1 January 2023
- correction of her deceased husband's Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) to show "Spouse and Child(ren)" coverage effective 1 January 2023

APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING DOCUMENT(S) CONSIDERED BY THE BOARD:

- DD Form 149 (Application for Correction of Military Record under the Provisions of Title 10, U.S. Code, Section 1552)
- State Holy Union of Matrimony Certificate and Marriage License, 16 February 2018
- Certificate of Death, 19 June 2022
- Financial Management Service Form 2231 (Direct Deposit), 21 June 2022
- DD Form 1300 (Report of Casualty), 26 July 2022
- Part 5 – Surviving Spouse Verification of SBP Counseling, 28 July 2022
- Spouse Statement of Desired SBP Election, 28 July 2022
- DD Form 2790 (Custodianship Certificate to Support Claim on Behalf of Minor Children of Deceased Members of the Armed Forces), 28 July 2022
- DD Forms 2656-7 (Verification for Survivor Annuity), 28 July 2022
- Internal Revenue Service Forms W-4P (Withholding Certificate for Pension or Annuity Payments), 28 July 2022
- U.S. Army Human Resources Command Memorandum (LOD Determination), 21 August 2023
- DD Form 2656-7, 7 September 2023
- DD Form 2790, 7 September 2023
- Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) Form 9145 (Representative Payee – Certification), 7 September 2023
- two Internal Revenue Service Forms W-4P, 7 September 2023
- DD Form 2656-7 (Verification for Survivor Annuity – Special), 7 September 2023
- DFAS Certificate of Eligibility for Surviving Spouse, 7 September 2023

FACTS:

1. The applicant, the surviving spouse of the deceased service member (SM) who died while serving on active duty, states she believes it is an injustice that her request to transfer the SBP annuity to her child (i.e., "Child-Only" coverage) could not be elected because the LOD determination was not completed prior to 1 January 2013, the effective date of the optional child-only election law repeal.
2. The SM enlisted in the Regular Army on 30 May 2017 in the rank/grade of specialist/E-4.
3. The SM's matrimony certificate shows he and the applicant married on 18 February 2018.
4. The SM was promoted to the rank/grade of sergeant/E-5 effective 1 March 2020.
5. The SM's death certificate shows he died on 19 June 2022 due to multiple blunt force injuries as a result of walking in the roadway when struck by an oncoming vehicle in Warsaw, NC.
6. The SM's records contain a DA Form 2173 (Statement of Medical Examination and Duty Status), 23 July 2022, showing he was admitted to the Womack Army Medical Center, Fort Bragg, NC, on 19 June 2022. He was pronounced dead on arrival. The form shows in:
 - a. item 13 (International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Code), the entry, "SM was being transported to hospital. SM jumped from EMS [emergency medical services] [vehicle]. struck by vehicle. died by Multi-BFI [multiple blunt force injuries] O/A [on or about] 19 June 2022";
 - b. item 28 (Duty Status), an "X" was placed in the "Excused" box;
 - c. item 37 (Formal Line of Investigation Required), the "Yes" block was checked; and
 - d. the form was signed by the unit commander on 25 May 2013.
7. The DD Form 1300 – Final Report, 26 July 2022, documented the SM's death on 19 June 2022 as the result of multiple blunt force injuries per the death certificate. His duty status was noted as "active duty."
8. On 28 July 2022, the applicant completed the Spouse Statement of Desired SBP Election showing:

a. She acknowledged she previously received an initial comprehensive briefing from an Army SBP counselor about the SBP options available to her and reviewed the Survivor Benefit Report. She understood this decision was irrevocable and should only be made when she had adequate time to review all the SBP data needed to make an informed decision.

b. She elected "Child Only, Spouse Excluded" SBP coverage. She desired that the Army make the SBP election on her behalf. She understood that all of the deceased Soldier's SBP-eligible children would receive an equal share of the SBP annuity. The children would receive the annuity until age 18 or age 22 if full-time unmarried students, or forever if incapable of self-support due to a condition incurred while eligible for the SBP. She understood she could request the annuity for an SBP-eligible child who was incapacitated to be paid to a special needs trust for the care of that child. She also understood the SBP would end when the last child was no longer eligible. If, on 1 January 2023, she was eligible to receive the SBP annuity, she will begin receiving it by law. The children will no longer receive the annuity. She understood that child SBP is taxable for the child.

9. The applicant's two DD Forms 2790, 28 July 2022 and 7 September 2023, certified that her child was the unmarried son of the deceased SM.

10. The applicant's two DD Forms 2656-7, 28 July 2022 and 7 September 2023, verified her child's eligibility for the SBP annuity as the deceased SM's surviving child. These documents were accompanied with the necessary documents for establishment of financial payments to her family.

11. The SM's records contain the DD Form 261 (Report of Investigation – LOD and Misconduct Status), 4 May 2023, with auxiliary documents, showing an investigation was conducted into the SM's death.

a. The report shows in:

- (1) item 3 (Status), the SM was a Regular Army Soldier;
- (2) item 10a (Circumstances), the incident occurred at 0330 on 19 June 2022 at Warsaw, NC;
- (3) item 10a(4) (How Sustained), the entry: "Walking in roadway when struck by a vehicle";
- (4) item 10b (Medical Diagnosis), the entry "Suicide";
- (5) item 10c (Present for Duty), an "X" was placed in the "Yes" box;

(6) item 10e (Was Intentional Misconduct or Neglect the Proximate Cause), an "X" was placed in the "No" box;

(7) item 10f (Was Individual Mentally Sound), an "X" was placed in the "No" box;

(8) item 10g (Remarks), the entry: "I find a preponderance of the evidence supports that [SM's] death was the result of an accident, caused, in part, by his then-existing mental state. I do not find that a preponderance of the evidence supports that [SM] voluntarily committed suicide"; and

(9) item 11 (Findings), the investigating officer marked "In Line of Duty."

b. The appointing authority approved the findings by his signature on 29 June 2023 and the reviewing authority, the same as the final approving authority, approved the findings by authority of the Secretary of the Army by his signature on the same date.

12. The U.S. Army Human Resources Command memorandum from the Chief, Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Division (LOD Determination), 21 August 2023, determined the SM who died in Warsaw, NC, on 19 June 2022 as the result of suicide was in the LOD at the time of his death.

13. The DFAS Form 9145, 7 September 2023, was certified by the applicant on 7 September 2023, establishing herself a representative payee to receive survivor annuity payments on behalf of a minor, mentally incompetent, or otherwise legally disabled person for whom a guardian or other fiduciary has not been appointed. This form was signed by her and a witness on 7 September 2023.

14. The DFAS Certificate of Eligibility for Surviving Spouse was certified by the applicant on 7 September 2023, establishing her marital status as "not married after the death of the SM" to establish her eligibility to receive an SBP annuity beginning January 2023.

15. The Department of the Army Office of the Deputy of Chief of Staff, G-1, memorandum from the Director, Army Retirement Services (Advisory Opinion – (SM), Issue: Surviving Spouse Request to Transfer SBP Annuity to Child Only until 31 December 2022), 20 December 2023, states:

a. Title 10, U.S. Code, section 1448(d)(1)(B), requires that the member who died on active duty and was not qualified for retirement must die in the LOD to be eligible for coverage under the SBP.

- b. Title 10, U.S. Code, section 1448(d)(2)(B), allows an eligible surviving spouse to transfer the SBP annuity to eligible children.
- c. Public Law 116-92, section 622, repealed the authority for an optional annuity for dependent children effective 1 January 2023. Effective the same date, it restored the annuity to any eligible spouses who previously elected to transfer the annuity to their surviving children.
- d. The applicant, whose spouse died on active duty prior to 1 January 2023 and after receiving her SBP counseling, requested that the SBP annuity be annuity be transferred to their child.
- e. The LOD determination was not completed and sent to the Army SBP Board until after 1 January 2023.
- f. If the LOD investigation was completed and sent to the Army SBP Board prior to 1 January 2023, she would still have had the ability to elect the optional child-only SBP coverage by law on behalf of the Secretary of the Army from the date of the SM's death until 31 December 2022.
- g. After careful review and in the interest of fairness, the Army Retirement Services Director supports the applicant's request to transfer the SBP annuity to child-only effective the date of the SM's death until 31 December 2022 and to revert to the eligible surviving spouse on 1 January 2023.

BOARD DISCUSSION:

After reviewing the application, all supporting documents, and the evidence found within the SM's military records, the Board found that relief was warranted. The applicant's contentions, the SM's military records, and regulatory guidance were carefully considered. The applicant's spouse died on active duty on 19 June 2022, prior to 1 January 2023. After receiving their SBP counseling, she requested that the SBP annuity be transferred to their child. The LOD investigation was not completed and sent to the Army SBP Board until after 1 January 2023. If the LOD investigation was completed and sent to the Army SBP prior to 1 January 2023, she would still have had the ability to elect the optional child-only SBP by law from the date of the SM's death until 31 December 2022. After careful review and in the interest of justice and fairness, the Board determined relief is warranted and supports the applicant's request to transfer the SBP annuity to her children effective the date of the SM's death until 31 December 2022 and to revert to the eligible surviving spouse on 1 January 2023.

BOARD VOTE:

Mbr 1 Mbr 2 Mbr 3

■	■	■	GRANT FULL RELIEF
:	:	:	GRANT PARTIAL RELIEF
:	:	:	GRANT FORMAL HEARING
:	:	:	DENY APPLICATION

BOARD DETERMINATION/RECOMMENDATION:

The Board determined that the evidence presented was sufficient to warrant a recommendation for relief. As a result, the Board recommends that all Department of the Army records of the individual concerned be corrected by:

- showing the Line of Duty Investigation was completed before 1 January 2023
- showing the applicant submitted a request to transfer the SBP annuity to her child(ren) effective the date of the SM's death (19 June 2022) until 31 December 2022 and to revert to the eligible surviving spouse on 1 January 2023

I certify that herein is recorded the true and complete record of the proceedings of the Army Board for Correction of Military Records in this case.

REFERENCES:

1. Title 10, U.S. Code, section 1448(d)(2)(B), states that in the case of a member who dies on or after the date of enactment of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004, 24 November 2003, and for whom there is a surviving spouse eligible for an annuity under paragraph (1), the Secretary may pay an annuity to the member's dependent children, if applicable, instead of paying an annuity to the surviving spouse if the Secretary concerned, in consultation with the surviving spouse, determines it

appropriate to provide an annuity for the dependent children instead of an annuity for the surviving spouse.

2. Public Law 116-92, section 622 (Phase-out of Reduction of SBP Survivor Annuities by Amount of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)), 20 December 2019, states the Secretary of the Military Department concerned shall restore annuity eligibility to any eligible surviving spouse who, in consultation with the Secretary, previously elected to transfer payment of such annuity to a surviving child or children under the provisions of Title 10, U.S. Code, section 1448(d)(20(B), as in effect on the day before the effective date of 1 January 2023. Such eligibility shall be restored whether or not payment to such child or children subsequently was terminated due to loss of dependent status or death. For the purposes of this subsection, an eligible spouse includes a spouse who was previously eligible for payment of such annuity and is not remarried, or remarried after having attained age 55, or whose second or subsequent marriage has been terminated by death, divorce, or annulment.

3. The Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) website: [www.dfas.mil/retired-military-survivors/Understanding-SBP-DIC-Special-Survivor-Indemnity-Allowance-\(SSIA\)/](http://www.dfas.mil/retired-military-survivors/Understanding-SBP-DIC-Special-Survivor-Indemnity-Allowance-(SSIA)/) provides guidance relating to the SBP for spouses and DIC benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

a. The DIC is a monetary benefit offered by the VA to survivors of SMs and retirees whose death results from a service-related injury or disease.

(1) Spouse SBP annuitants, except for those who remarry after age 55 (or in other specific circumstances), cannot receive full SBP and DIC at the same time before 2023. Beginning in 2021, there are significant changes to the offset of SBP and DIC.

(2) DIC payments made directly to children, or to a guardian on behalf of children, do not affect SBP child annuity payments.

(3) In 2022 when DFAS was informed by the VA that a spouse annuitant is receiving the DIC, the law required that DFAS deduct one-third of the amount of the DIC received from the amount of SBP payable and pay the remaining amount of the SBP to the annuitant. This is called the SBP/DIC offset. The reduction of the SBP/DIC offset from the full amount of DIC to one-third of DIC was effective 1 January 2022.

(4) For example, in 2022 if an annuitant receives a monthly SBP annuity of \$1,200 from DFAS and receives a monthly DIC award of \$1,500 from the VA, DFAS will deduct one-third of the amount of DIC (\$500) from the \$1,200 SBP and pay the remaining \$700 to the annuitant. The annuitant will continue receive the full amount of DIC from the VA (in this example, \$1,500).

(5) On 1 January 2023, the offset was completely eliminated. Eligible surviving spouses will receive their full SBP payments and their full DIC payments.

(6) The change in the law does not affect DIC payments, it only affects SBP payments when the surviving spouse is also receiving the DIC. Refer to the DFAS SBP/DIC news webpage for details and Frequently Asked Questions.

(7) When a spouse is eligible to receive the SBP and DIC, and those payments are subject to the SBP/DIC offset, the spouse will also receive the SSIA.

b. SSIA is a benefit for surviving spouses who receive an SBP annuity that is offset by a DIC payment from the VA.

(1) In 2022, the SSIA will be paid at up to \$346 per month. Eligible survivors will continue to receive the SSIA up to the maximum amount per month, or up to the gross amount of the SBP (if the gross amount of SBP is less than the maximum amount) until 31 December 2022. The SSIA will not be paid in 2023.

(2) SSIA is not used to repay past-due SBP premiums. If the spouse annuitant is entitled to the SSIA, DFAS will pay the SSIA, even when there are past-due premiums.

(3) DIC payments to children do not affect SBP child annuitant payments, so child annuitants are not eligible to receive the SSIA.

//NOTHING FOLLOWS//