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ATTORNEY GENERAL, SEN. VIVERITO PROPOSE PROGRAM TO ASSIST FAMILIES OF FALLEN LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS, MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS

Amendment Designed to Remedy Bureaucratic Delays in Compensation Program

Springfield—Earlier today, legislation proposed by Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Sen. Louis Viverito (D-Chicago) that would create an assistance program for families of fallen law enforcement officers and military service members passed out of committee by a unanimous vote. The bill, if passed by the General Assembly, would amend the Line of Duty Compensation Act to ensure victims' families gain efficient and effective access to information about their pending compensation claims.

"Some families have waited for more than four years for their cases to be resolved, and during this period, they did not receive updates on the status of their claims," Madigan said. "These families have already suffered an immeasurable loss. We must make sure that we don't add to their pain by failing to provide them necessary information in a timely fashion. With this legislation, we can make some simple changes that will improve the claims process and keep families informed throughout the course of their claim. I applaud Sen. Viverito for sponsoring this important legislation and look forward to working with the General Assembly to see to its passage."

Under the Line of Duty Compensation Act, family members of an individual killed in the line of duty are entitled to compensation through the Court of Claims. The legislation, Senate Bill 1493, sponsored by Senators Viverito, Kwame Raoul, Michael Noland, William Haine and Antonio Munoz, would establish a "Gold Star Families Assistance Program" to provide these families with detailed information about their Line of Duty Compensation Act claims. The bill calls for the Court of Claims to create a toll-free helpline solely dedicated to families seeking information about the Line of Duty Compensation Act and the status of their claims. The bill also would require the Court of Claims to submit information annually to the Governor, the General Assembly and the Department of Veterans' Affairs concerning the status of Line of Duty Compensation Act claims pending in the Illinois Court of Claims.

"The Line of Duty Compensation Act is an important way that we recognize the ultimate sacrifice made by our men and women who serve in the military, on police forces and in fire departments," said Sen. Viverito. "Giving survivors a real person at the Court of Claims who can answer questions quickly and accurately is a simple thing that I hope will in some way ease the burden of the loss these families live with."

Joy Costa, a Monticello, Ill., resident, who also testified today, said the piecemeal fashion in which information is delivered is among the most difficult challenges facing families who have lost someone in the line of duty. Costa's son, Army Spc. Seth. A. Miller, was killed April 14, 2008, on a training mission in Germany while preparing to deploy to Iraq. Costa said she was surprised to learn later that her family would be eligible for compensation.

"When you lose someone in the line of duty, suddenly there are so many different forms you have to file and paperwork you have to follow up on," Costa said. "You just want to make sure you're taking care of everything correctly. It's a tremendous responsibility and an overwhelming process. This legislation would be a tremendous service for all the Illinois families who are struggling to ensure their loved ones are honored for their sacrifice."

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