Grady Langenderfer HB339 Testimony.

Good afternoon, Chair Willis, Vice Chair Daniels, Ranking member Grim and members of the Ohio Transportation Committee.

My name is Grady Langenderfer. I'm 12 years old, and I started the Poppy Run, a 5K race that gives back to veterans organizations in memory of my poppa's friends who never made it home from Vietnam. I'm here today to speak in support of HB 339, a bill that would allow surviving spouses of Purple Heart recipients to keep their loved one's Purple Heart license plate as a way to honor their service and sacrifice.

In January 2025, something happened that changed my life. I lost my poppa. After he passed away, I started thinking about ways I could help veterans and their families.

So how did I get this idea? My poppa was a Purple Heart recipient. Right now, when a Purple Heart veteran passes away, their spouse is not allowed to keep the Purple Heart license plate on their vehicle. My nana wanted to keep hers. That made me wonder how many other spouses are out there just like my nana.

While my poppa was alive, there was never a problem with my nana driving his truck. She drove it to the grocery store, to the hospital, and even to my school. No one questioned it. No one said it was wrong. So I don't understand what changes the moment he passes away? Why should she suddenly have to replace the plate?

My poppa always said the VA hospital was one of the saddest places to go. I understand that now. You can see it in the eyes of the veterans. You can see it in the eyes of the people who love them. You can see the worry, the fear, and sometimes the feeling of being forgotten. I have seen those same looks in my nana and my poppa.

Purple Heart veterans go through more than most people realize. They carry injuries that change their lives forever. Some live with visible wounds lost limbs, scars, or mobility issues. Others live with injuries you can't see, like traumatic brain injuries, chronic pain, or post-traumatic stress. Many face a lifetime of doctor visits, surgeries, medications, and rehabilitation. Simple things like sleeping through the night, being in crowds, or even driving can be a daily struggle. For many, the hardest battles don't end when the war does.

And through all of this, their spouses are there. Even though most didn't serve in the military, spouses serve in their own way. They go to appointments, help at home, and stay strong during the hard days. They share the good days and the bad days all because they love their veteran.

One of my favorite quotes is from Winston Churchill. He said, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." I believe those "few" include

not only the veterans who were wounded, but also the spouses who stood by them every single day.

As I stand before you, I have my poppa's Purple Heart.

He earned it in blood during Operation Scotland II in 1969. He was trying to help his friend when a mine exploded. His friend died in that blast. My poppa survived, but his friend did not. That is the cost of the sacrifice the Purple Heart represents.

The other item I have is his Purple Heart license plate.

For my nana, it represents more than just a medal or a plate. It represents more than 50 years of what most people never see a cough that never went away, restless nights, pain, surgeries, and years of letters trying to get someone to listen. It represents fighting for claims after the VA lost his records. It represents hundreds of hours, days, and miles spent going to doctor appointments and surgeries.

This plate is a rolling memorial. It means none of that should be forgotten. Even as he was dying in his bed at the VA hospital, he was still asking why no one would help. But through all of it, he said he would do it all over again. The license plate is a way for a spouse to honor their veteran. It keeps their story alive. It helps bring closure.

HB 339 is a simple, narrow, and focused solution. It fixes the problem from the past. It only applies to Purple Heart plates. It makes one small exception for a surviving spouse who has not remarried. The same proof and fraud protections stay in place. The medal is not being given to anyone else.
The Purple Heart will always belong to the veteran who earned it. The plate just becomes a way to honor and remember them. This doesn't weaken the meaning. It protects it.

Other states are already doing this. Indiana allows surviving spouses to keep the Purple Heart plate with clear rules and proper documentation. Washington, D.C., is working on something similar. If it can be done respectfully there, it can be done respectfully in Ohio.

None of us would be here if brave men and women had not bled. They bled on beaches, in fields and hills, in muddy trenches, across oceans and rivers, on ships at sea. They bled in jungles and deserts, inside caves and bunkers, through dark tunnels, in the skies above, in thick forests, and even in the streets of cities and small towns.

The Purple Heart is earned by blood. It is not given lightly. It means someone was wounded or gave something of themselves for our country. And when that veteran is gone, the plate should stay. It should remain as a rolling memorial for the spouse who cared for them, who drove them to appointments, and who stood beside them through the hardest days.

Because their sacrifice mattered. It still matters. And it should never be forgotten. We can honor it not just by talking about it, but by remembering it every day and showing respect in what we do. That is why HB 339 matters, and why we should make sure their story and sacrifice are never lost.

Thank you chairman Willis, vice-chair Daniels ranking member Grim and those of the house transportation committee for allowing me to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.