Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 11, 2026

The Honorable Samuel B. Brown
Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Under Secretary Brown:

As Members of the Michigan Congressional Delegation, we write regarding the effort to establish a State Veterans cemetery serving Northern Michigan, and to ask for the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) flexibility in ensuring that the Veterans of the Upper Peninsula are not left behind. We are grateful for your leadership of the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) and for your continued work to ensure that Veterans in every State, including Michigan, have reasonable access to a dignified final resting place close to home.[1]

We recognize and appreciate that NCA has already engaged with our State in this effort. The Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency has pursued a State Veterans cemetery, and NCA's current priority list ranks the State's proposed project at Grayling first among projects to establish new Veterans cemeteries.[2] It is regrettable that, despite this standing, land acquisition has stalled and the project has not advanced to construction. We do not write to revisit that history. We write because the project's path forward is increasingly uncertain, and even if it advances, a cemetery at Grayling would leave the most isolated Veterans in our State – those residing in the Upper Peninsula – without reasonable access. These Veterans should not have to wait on a single project that may not move forward, and that would not reach them if it did.

Today, Michigan has no VA grant-funded State Veterans cemetery, and no Veterans cemetery in the Upper Peninsula is open for new burials.[3] NCA has long sought to provide Veterans with an open cemetery within 75 miles of their homes.[4] For the Upper Peninsula, the nearest options fall dramatically short of that standard: roughly 125 miles as the crow flies from Marquette to Northwoods National Cemetery in Harshaw, Wisconsin, and 320 miles to Great Lakes National Cemetery in Holly, Michigan.[5] By road, those distances grow to roughly 160 miles and 400 miles, respectively. There is no open Veterans cemetery anywhere between Holly and Harshaw. For the families of the Upper Peninsula, the choice between burial in a Veterans cemetery and a private one simply does not exist today.

We understand that the State has proposed Grayling because it satisfies NCA's Veteran-population-density criteria, which the more sparsely populated areas to its north do not. We do not question that Grayling is a worthy project. However, while Grayling satisfies the current population-based prioritization framework, we are concerned that it does little to advance another core objective of the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program: providing Veterans with reasonable geographic access to a Veterans cemetery. For Veterans residing in the

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[1] National Cemetery Administration, *Veterans Cemetery Grants Program: Background*, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, https://www.cem.va.gov/grants/background.asp.

National Cemetery Administration, *Veterans Cemetery Grant Program: FY2027 Priority List of Grant Construction Preapplications*, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, https://www.cem.va.gov/grants/priority-list.asp.

National Cemetery Administration, *Find a Cemetery*, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, https://www.cem.va.gov/find-cemetery/state.asp?STATE=MI; National Cemetery Administration, *VA Grant-Funded Cemeteries*, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, https://www.cem.va.gov/find-cemetery/all-grant-funded.asp.

National Cemetery Administration, *Veterans Cemetery Grants Program: Background*.

[5] National Cemetery Administration, *VA National Cemeteries*, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, https://www.cem.va.gov/find-cemetery/all-national.asp.

Upper Peninsula, that access challenge would remain essentially unchanged should a cemetery at Grayling come to fruition. Grayling lies in the northern Lower Peninsula, far nearer to the State's existing national cemeteries than the Upper Peninsula. A Veteran in Marquette would still face a drive of roughly 250 miles to reach it, leaving those with the least access no better off than they are today.

We therefore ask that NCA consider an exception for Michigan's unique geography, so that a site in the Upper Peninsula may be weighed on equal footing with Grayling, whether the State elects to relocate its existing application northward or to pursue an Upper Peninsula cemetery in addition to Grayling. We recognize that a site serving the Upper Peninsula is unlikely to ever match the Veteran-population density of a Lower Peninsula site, and that under NCA's priority framework, this places such a site at a persistent disadvantage.[6] But the Department has already recognized, through its Rural Initiative, that the Veterans of remote and low-density regions deserve access notwithstanding population thresholds. Northwoods National Cemetery is itself a Rural Initiative cemetery, built to serve Wisconsin's Veterans. Indeed, the Rural Initiative reflects the longstanding recognition that geographic isolation may warrant a different approach than population density alone. The Veterans of Michigan's Upper Peninsula face many of those same challenges recognized by NCA in the case of Harshaw, with travel distances that substantially exceed NCA's longstanding access goals. Should Michigan bring forward such an Upper Peninsula site, we ask that the Department lend its full support to the location of the State's choosing.

We thank you again for your work to expand burial access for Veterans across the country, and for the high standard of service the National Cemetery Administration extends to Veterans and their families. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that those who served from Michigan's Upper Peninsula are finally afforded the same access to a dignified resting place that their fellow Veterans enjoy elsewhere, both downstate and across the country.

Sincerely,

Jack Bergman
Member of Congress

John R. Moolenaar
Member of Congress

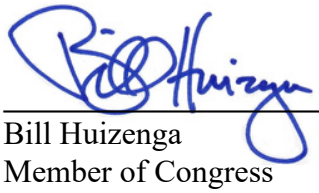
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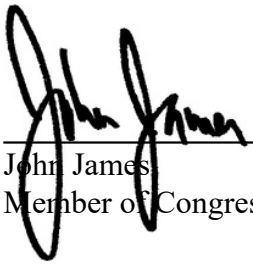
[6] 38 U.S.C. § 2408; 38 C.F.R. pt. 39.



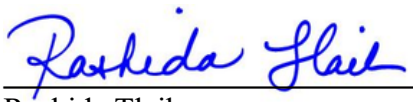
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