

Floor Remarks – SB 923  
Senator Lisa Baker – December 3, 2013

Senate Bill 923 will expand an essential program that helps military families facing critical needs.

Consider some of the Military Family Relief Assistance Program's past recipients:

One applicant was wounded during deployment and could no longer work. While waiting for his incapacitation pay to begin, his mortgage and household bills became overdue.

Another soldier with PTSD was without a job but searching desperately. He had no place to live, because he could not afford the security deposit on an apartment or the cost of setting up utilities.

These are just a few of the richly deserving recipients of the MFRAP program.

Unfortunately, many others do not qualify for help. The father who is behind on bills due to the unexpected costs of a severe car accident. The mother who lost her job and doesn't have the money to pay for heating oil. The family who is displaced because of a house fire. They have fallen on hard times through no fault of their own, after laying their lives on the line for their country.

The MFRAP program was launched in 2005 as part of a Support our Soldiers initiative. The program has indeed supported our troops for eight years, with grants of up to \$3,500 for emergency aid.

Thanks to the generosity of so many Pennsylvanians who voluntarily check-off a donation on their personal income tax refund, we could be helping many more soldiers and military families like these struggling heroes. Money currently exists in the program that is not being used, because the guidelines for the program are too narrowly drawn.

This bill expands the rules in significant ways – like helping with any emergency circumstance, such as a death, fire or job loss, not just those related to deployment. And eligibility would be extended for three years after a deployment, instead of one. The program is also extended through June 30, of 2020.

It is wonderful that Pennsylvanians have been so generous that we are able to take care of even more veterans with short-term crises without hurting the long-term stability of the fund.

Military families have called this program a life-saver, so I thank you for considering this important bill. Its passage would be a belated Veterans Day thank you and an early Christmas gift to those who have given so much for us.