

News and stories

Monument to honor families of fallen soldiers

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BATON ROUGE — The state’s Gold Star Families Honoring Committee on Thursday approved the design for a monument near the Capitol honoring the families of fallen soldiers.

Ruth Reed, a Gold Star mother, testified that she had seen photographs of monuments in other states on the internet.

“Praise God we are going to finally have one,” she said.

The Defense Department defines Gold Star families as immediate relatives of members of the U.S. Armed Forces who have been killed in combat or supporting military activities.

Rep. Helena Moreno, D-New Orleans, pioneered this endeavor. Moreno, who will leave the Legislature this spring to take an at-large seat on the New Orleans City Council, worked closely with the Hershel “Woody” Williams Medal of Honor Foundation.

Williams is the sole surviving Marine from World War II to wear the Medal of Honor. He visited the Louisiana Capitol for a Memorial Day ceremony in 2017 and flipped the coin at the start of last Super Bowl LII in Minneapolis.

Williams' foundation established its first Gold Star Families Monument in 2010 in Charleston, Virginia. Since then, the Foundation has expanded to 31 projects in 18 states. Thirty-six other states have initiated efforts to create memorials.

Today, monuments commemorating Civil War generals can be polarizing. The Louisiana Legislature, however, wants to move in the opposite direction and commend families who have lost members paying the ultimate price of freedom in other wars.

Rep. Moreno proposed two locations for the monument. As Plan A, Moreno would like to place the memorial on the Capitol building footprint right outside the House Committee meeting rooms, which overlook Veterans Memorial Park. Alternatively, the park would house the monument.

The Capitol footprint area receives more traffic. But two obstacles may make it difficult to place the monument there.

First, an engineer will need to assess the ability of the Capitol building to handle the 15,000-pound weight of the monument. The National World War II Museum volunteered to pay for the assessment.

Second, the Capitol's listing on the National Historic Registry may be an issue. Lt. Gov. Billy Nungesser verified to Moreno that adding the monument might negatively impact the building's registry status.

The monument will be privately funded. Gov. John Bel Edwards, who is an Army veteran, and members of the committee plan to raise \$100,000 for the project. Major General Glenn Curtis, a committee member and the Adjutant General for the Louisiana National Guard, said he would like to see more money raised for Louisiana "to have the nicest monument of all U.S. states and territories."