

Dear Governor Haley,

My name is Jake Gallin and I am 14 years old. I recently graduated from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Albert Leonard Middle School in New Rochelle, NY. When I was a third grade student I founded an organization called Stars for Cars. Stars for Cars was founded in January of 2011 after I heard Mrs. Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden on a television show say we need to recognize the "Blue Star" and "Gold Star" Military Families in our communities. I learned that a "Blue Star" signifies that there is a family member who is Serving in the Armed Forces and that a "Gold Star" signifies that a loved one has died while Serving Our Nation. Mrs. Obama reminded the audience that 1% of our country is protecting the other 99% of our country. Also on the show was a woman named Teresa Arciola. She spoke of her son, Michael A. Arciola, Private First Class, United States Army. Michael lost his life at age 20 while fighting in Iraq for our freedom. I decided to design a star shaped magnetic car decal in hopes of raising awareness of the "Blue Star" and "Gold Star" Military Families. They are sold in person and on my website, [www.starsforcars.org](http://www.starsforcars.org). I dedicated the Stars for Cars website to Michael. 100% of the proceeds go to the United Service Organization (USO), who is our official partner. The "Blue Star" and "Gold Star" Military Families need to be recognized all over the place, everywhere we go. Wherever the decals go, then that town or city they travel to will know about the "Blue Star" and "Gold Star" Military Families. I am not contacting you for a donation to my program, I only wanted to provide you with some background information.

The Arciola family, a New York Military Family ("Gold Star") has inspired me to work on behalf of all Military Families for the past five and one half years and their sacrifice has led me to request a bill from both Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and The United States House of Representatives. I would like to have the following announcement read during the school day on three patriotic holidays and they are Patriot Day (9/11), Veterans Day, and Memorial Day: **"We take this time to remember our "Blue Star" and "Gold Star" Military Families and thank them for their sacrifice and generosity. We want them to know that they are a part of our community."** The cost of this bill would be minimal. The only cost I foresee would be the time for a person to e-mail all of the school officials about the announcement and to verify that it was implemented.

In order to gain support for this in the summer of 2014 I sent out more than 7,000 letters to all schools, superintendents, and government officials across New York State. Within three months of the mailing, more than 100 schools signed on from Staten Island to Erie County, NY. This initiative received positive feedback and support from Teachers, Principals, Superintendents, Mayors, Assemblymen and Assemblywomen, County Executives, and Senators. I have watched it grow from having it said within one elementary school, then city-wide, to state-wide. To date, 200,000 students hear the announcement in New York, Virginia, New Hampshire, Minnesota, and Kentucky. My dream is to take the "3 Holidays Announcement" nationally and internationally, wherever Military Families are.

In the summer of 2015, I shared my dream with and asked for feedback from all of the Governors, key educational policy makers and many national and international organizations, in hopes that my dream will be realized. Next, I contacted all of the Members of The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and requested a Bill supporting the "3 Holidays Announcement." In February, I was contacted by Saki Ververis, Senior Legislative Assistant House Veterans' Affairs Committee, who informed me that my request was passed along to the office of Congresswoman Susan A. Davis of California, the Ranking Member of the Military Personnel Subcommittee of The House Armed Services Committee. Since then, I

have reached out to other government and education officials and asked them for their assistance including contacting her office.

**Now, I am once again reaching out to you with the hope that you will help move this effort forward on a state and national level.**

Having students across this great Nation of splendor, opportunity, and justice recognize the people I call "Our Heroic One Percenters" during the school day is something I feel passionate about. Recognizing those who are currently protecting us or who have died while doing so by taking a moment to acknowledge them three times a year during the school day means that they will never be forgotten. This announcement also serves as a conversation starter. Many children are unfamiliar with the terms "Blue Star" and "Gold Star." Conversely, those who come to school carrying the burden of having lost a loved one or live with the fear they might lose a loved one while in Service to Our Nation, know all too well what these terms mean. According to the Blue Star Families 2015 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Infographic, "90% of active duty service members and their families felt that the general public does not understand the sacrifices made by service members and their families." School is a place where we are educated, not only about core academics, but also about who is a part of and what takes place in our community. My family has taught me that our community is an extension of our family. I do not want to leave anyone out of our family, in particular, those who protect and defend our freedom. Military Families move on average nine times during a school career. They need to know that they are a part of whatever community they are in at least on these three holidays. I also want families who have lost someone they have loved and who sacrificed for all of us to never feel disconnected from their community. **Those who Serve Our Nation are willing to give a sacrifice that is permanent.** And, that is exactly what the legacy of Our Nation is. Our legacy is that of sacrifice, permanence, and honor. That is what any visitor to Arlington National Cemetery can see.

Your feedback regarding the "3 Holidays Announcement" is greatly appreciated. **I am hopeful that either the "3 Holidays Announcement" can be made into a Bill or that, if similar Bills already exist, that it can be attached to them.** Our "Blue Star" and "Gold Star" Military Families deserve our recognition and respect. They sacrifice. They protect. They belong.

Thank you for doing all that you do.

Your Neighbor,



Jake Gallin, Age 14

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