

January 12, 2024

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Bost
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
352 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark Takano
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
2078 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tester, Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Moran, and Ranking Member Takano:

On behalf of a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates, and other stakeholders, we are writing to you today to encourage the inclusion of three key bills in any forthcoming legislative package focused on Veterans' health.

Suicide remains the 13th leading cause of death for Veterans, and the second leading cause of death for Veterans under the age of 45. In 2021, the most recent year for which data are available, the unadjusted suicide rate for Veterans increased by 1.8% -- reversing progress made in the previous two years.¹

We respectfully urge that the following bipartisan bills be included in any forthcoming package concerning Veterans' health. These bills are bipartisan, have been voted out of their respective committees in at least one chamber, and would meaningfully help to prevent suicide among Veterans:

- H.R.984/S.106, the *CVSO Act*, authorize the first direct source of federal funding for tribal and county Veterans service officers, commonly known as CVSOs. These workers help Veterans and their families navigate and apply for benefits and services, including VA enrollment and health-related benefits. This legislation has been passed by the Senate with unanimous consent, and has been approved by the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.
- H.R.3722/S.132, the *Daniel J. Harvey, Jr. and Adam Lambert Improving Servicemember Transition to Reduce Veteran Suicide Act*, will create a five-year pilot program run by the DoD and the VA to help servicemembers and Veterans during the process of transition away from active-duty military service. This includes information about how Veterans can receive mental health care through the VA, the risks many Veterans face during the first year of transition into civilian life, and other information about benefits and services available for Veterans. This bill has been approved by the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and has been voted out of subcommittee in the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

- S.10, the *VA Clinician Appreciation, Recruitment, Education, Expansion, and Retention Support (CAREERS) Act*, will revamp the VA's system of paying physicians and other clinicians, which will directly address the provider shortage faced by VA medical centers nationwide, particularly in rural areas. It will help cover costs for licensure tests for future clinicians participating in VA scholarship programs, increase reimbursement opportunities for professional education for VA staff, and otherwise help the VA to recruit and retain medical staff. As you know, this bill is led by Chairman Jon Tester and has been approved by the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Thank you for your consideration and for your dedication to our nation's Veterans.

Respectfully yours,

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Mental Health Counselors Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Clinical Social Work Association
Crisis Text Line
Employee Assistance Professionals Association
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
The Kennedy Forum
National Alliance on Mental Illness
Psychotherapy Action Network

ⁱ Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Department of Veterans Affairs. *2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report*. November 2023.