

Statement of Congressman Dave Loebsack (IA-02)
House Veterans Affairs Committee
Members' Day Hearing
September 10, 2019

H.R. 2997 – The Sgt. Brandon Ketchum Never Again Act

- I want to thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for the opportunity to highlight an issue of importance not just to veterans in my district, but to veterans and their families across the country.
- Our nation has a responsibility to ensure that our veterans are served with the same dignity and honor with which they have served. This includes providing veterans with access to the services they need to successfully transition from active duty to civilian life, including of course, comprehensive and accessible mental healthcare services.
- There is a devastating mental health crisis in our country, and it is disproportionately impacting our veteran community. As you know, we tragically lose over 20 veterans each day to suicide. One death of a veteran to suicide is too many, and we must address this national health crisis.
- Many of our nation's veterans face post-traumatic stress disorder and other serious mental health issues upon their return home, and these veterans have sacrificed too much to ever feel alone when in a crisis. When these veterans reach out, we as a country owe it to them to answer their call.
- Three years ago in my district, a veteran named Sgt. Brandon Ketchum died by suicide after being denied in-patient care at a VA Medical Center. Tragically, this is not the first time a veteran has asked to be admitted for mental healthcare at the VA in this country and been denied.
- This is unacceptable and we in Congress have the responsibility to pass legislation to ensure that it never happens again.
- My legislation, the Sgt. Brandon Ketchum Never Again Act, would require that when a veteran enrolled in the VA healthcare system requests at a VA Medical Center to be admitted for in-patient psychiatric care, the VA must provide that care for the veteran in the psychiatric ward of that Medical

Center. If there are not enough beds or providers at that location, the VA must find care for the veteran for a non-VA facility.

- This bill would not prevent admissions as they currently operate, but rather would supplement existing policy. For example, if a veteran displays suicidal ideations but does not explicitly request to be admitted to the in-patient psychiatric ward, his or her doctor could still recommend admission.
- Sgt. Ketchum's tragic death reinforces the need for systemic change within the VA to ensure any veteran who is suffering from a mental health issue gets the treatment they need and deserve. Simply put, under the Sgt. Brandon Ketchum Never Again Act, if a veteran asks for in-patient mental healthcare from the VA, they will get it.
- By giving veterans the power to get the mental health treatment they want, we can take an important step to ensuring that no veteran ever again wonders whether he or she is "sick" enough to be admitted for psychiatric care.
- As a military parent, this issue is deeply personal to me and I am fully committed to working with the committee to ensure that no veteran in need is ever turned away again.
- I hope the Committee will support my bipartisan legislation to improve access to mental healthcare for veterans in need. I thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for your time and consideration.