

May 21, 2019

The Honorable Mark Takano, Chairman
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
B234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Phil Roe, Ranking Member
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
3460 O'Neill House Office Building
Washington, DC 20024

The Honorable Johnny Isakson, Chairman
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
418 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester, Ranking Member
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
825A Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Roe, Chairman Isakson, and Ranking Member Tester:

On behalf of communities across the Nation who are organized to serve military service members, veterans, and their family members we offer our strong support for the development of legislation to implement the Executive Order on a "National Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End Suicide," also known as the "PREVENTS Executive Order." This revolutionary proposal will improve the quality of life of our Nation's veterans while empowering communities (municipalities, counties, states, tribal areas, and regions) to combine their veteran engagement efforts with targeted suicide prevention programs to end veteran suicide.

In 2008, Public Law 110-387, Section 604 of the Veterans' Mental Health and Other Care Improvements Act, authorized the Department of Veterans Affairs to develop the "Supportive Services for Veterans and Families" Program also known as "SSVF." SSVF grants were awarded to selected private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives that assisted very low-income veteran families residing in or transitioning to permanent housing. While these grants virtually ended veteran homelessness in many communities, they also created an environment of community collaboration by integrating government and non-government resources around the crisis of veteran's homelessness.

Our organizations strongly support the implementation of a program that enlists communities to end veteran suicide, the way SSVF sought to do the same for veteran homelessness. Through grant supported coordination programs that bring together community veteran-serving organizations to provide veterans and their families with a multitude of services and supports, including those related to employment, health, housing, benefits, recreation, education, and social connection, we believe these empowered communities will improve the quality of life for veterans and subsequently eliminate veteran suicide.

We believe the community model used to coordinate care can vary among grantees based on veteran populations, geography, or cultural boundaries. However, regardless of the model, all grantees must seek to improve the quality of life and hopefulness of veterans and their families by identifying those at greatest risk for suicide and not currently utilizing life services; utilizing an information management system to manage, measure, and track progress; and operating an impactful network of community services.

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While we feel the grant management and administration should generally align with the SSVF process, we believe state-level coordination of services would be additive to the success of the community oriented PREVENTS Initiative.

We believe the measures of success are not just mental health focused, but must be holistic and result in a set of outcomes across the social determinants of health, in order to achieve the critical outcome of eliminating veteran suicide. These holistic measures should include lower homelessness, improved access to medical and behavioral care, improved education status, reduced unemployment and underemployment, and increased resilience or hopefulness. Additionally, using established research methods, communities should establish their veteran suicide baseline and track their impact throughout the grant.

Lastly, we believe community grantees must represent the communities they serve and have the support of the communities' government and non-government leadership when applying for and receiving these community grants.

As leaders of the nation's largest veteran community collaboratives, our organizations have developed, operated, and replicated veteran community integration programs with more than 70,000 veterans supported by over 1,000 partners in our twenty-six affiliated rural and urban communities representing 18 states, across our nation. We applaud Congress for developing the legislation to end veteran suicide by creating strong, more collaborative communities that focus on the veteran. We thank you for your steadfast leadership in crafting this important bipartisan bill and call on all members of Congress to seize this historic opportunity to improve the lives of veterans, their families and caregivers by empowering communities to reduce veteran suicide. The men and women who have served, are serving and will serve in the future are counting on Congress' support.

Respectfully,



Jim Lorraine
President and CEO
America's Warrior Partnership



J. Michael Haynie, Ph.D.
Vice Chancellor, Syracuse University
and Executive Director of the Institute for
Veterans and Military Families



John Boerstler
Executive Director
Combined Arms