



## *Congress of the United States*

*House of Representatives*

*Washington, DC 20515-0916*

May 26, 2021

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

Hon. Mike Bost  
Ranking Member  
House Veterans Affairs Committee  
3460 O'Neill House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20024

Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Bost, I want to start today by thanking you both for holding this Member's Day hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to testify and share my support for our nation's veterans.

I have the distinct honor of having both previously served six years in the Air National Guard, but also now representing a district with a veteran population topping 77,000.

The work we do in Congress for the members of our armed forces - both active duty and veteran - is one of the most sacred duties we have. They sacrificed themselves to protect the freedoms we hold dear, and I am honored to help those men and women when they separate from service.

Today I am here to testify about my bill, H.R. 67, the Veteran Overmedication and Suicide Prevention Act of 2021. My bill is simple and calls for VA to investigate the link between highly addictive opioids and veteran suicides. Specifically, my legislation would require the VA to review the deaths of all veterans it treated who died by suicide or a drug overdose in the past five years and calls for listing "any medications that carried a black box warning, were prescribed for off-label use, were psychotropic or carried warnings that include suicidal ideation." My hope is that this new data will be used to better treat veterans suffering from both mental and physical injuries.

As I'm sure you're aware, VA released a report in 2019 that showed:

- at least 60,000 veterans died by suicide between 2008 and 2017
- In 2005, VA estimated 15.9 veterans died by suicide per day increasing to 16.8 in 2017 - a rate 1.5 times higher than civilians
- veteran suicides account for 15 percent of all US suicides with one occurring on average every 72 minutes

These statistics are shocking and tragic, and we must work together to reverse this alarming trend. VA has taken steps on their own to both reduce overprescribing and also treat the invisible wounds of war, but we can't rest until we eliminate these unnecessary deaths.

I'm pleased to announce that my bill was endorsed by three of our nation's leading veterans service organizations:

- the VFW;
- the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America; and
- AMVETS

I appreciate the work the House Veterans Affairs Committee does, I look forward to working with members of the committee on advancing my legislation and I yield back the balance of my time.

Sincerely,



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Vern Buchanan  
Member of Congress