

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
420 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

September 28, 2022

Dear Chairman Takano,

We are grateful that the Committee is addressing and prioritizing veteran suicide prevention while specifically calling attention to innovative new ways to address this nationwide epidemic.

Founded in 1974, Brady works across Congress, courts, and communities, uniting gun owners and non-gun owners alike, to take action, not sides, and end America's gun violence epidemic. Our organization today carries the name of Jim Brady, who was shot and severely injured in the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan. Jim and his wife, Sarah, led the fight to pass federal legislation requiring background checks for gun sales. Brady continues to uphold Jim and Sarah's legacy by uniting Americans from coast to coast, red and blue, young and old, liberal and conservative, to combat the epidemic of gun violence.

As you are aware, approximately 17 veterans die by suicide each day in America, and more than 70 percent of those deaths involve a firearm.¹ Alarmingly, the rate of veteran suicide is 57 percent higher than non-Veteran adults and while suicide is the 13th leading cause of death among Veterans overall, it is the second leading cause of death among Veterans under the age of 45.² Clearly we need to act — and addressing access to and safe storage of firearms is key.

Addressing suicide by firearm is top among Brady's main strategic organizational priorities. In 2018, Brady launched its national End Family Fire campaign. End Family Fire, a joint effort from Brady and the Ad Council aims to encourage safe gun storage by putting a name to the preventable tragedies that occur when guns are misused. "Family Fire" a term developed for the campaign, refers to a shooting involving an improperly stored or misused gun in the home that results in death or injury.

In 2020, after a year of consumer research, and in recognizing that more than half of all suicides are by firearm,³ Brady significantly expanded its End Family Fire campaign to include firearm suicide prevention.⁴ Campaign research revealed that most Americans were unaware of the prevalence of gun suicide, a major barrier to addressing this public health crisis.

Last fall, as national data highlighted Veterans at a far greater risk of firearm suicide, Brady adapted its End Family Fire campaign to Veterans and along with Ad Council launched "Service Never Stops,"⁵ a series of public



¹ "National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, September 2022, available at <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2022/2022-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-FINAL-508.pdf>

² "National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, September 2022, available at <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2022/2022-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-FINAL-508.pdf>

³ National Vital Statistics System Mortality Data (2020) via CDC WONDER, available at <https://wonder.cdc.gov/controller/saved/D76/D266F208>

⁴ Ad Council Press Release, New National Campaign reveals How Safe Storage Can Help Prevent Suicide, 9/16/22, <https://www.adcouncil.org/press-releases/new-national-campaign-reveals-how-safe-firearm-storage-can-help-prevent-suicide>

⁵ Brady press release <https://www.bradyunited.org/press-releases/end-family-fire-facebook-advertising-ad-council-veterans-suicide>

service announcements (PSAs). The series features Veterans encouraging their peers to store their firearms safely to protect themselves and their loved ones. Campaign evaluation data has revealed that less than a third (31 percent) of veterans surveyed agreed that storing all guns locked and unloaded in the home reduces the risk of suicide so the campaign is designed to include gun owners in the conversation on why safe storage matters.⁶

Unrestricted firearm access, particularly in times of crisis, results in higher rates of death by suicide – while all acts of suicide result in death 10 percent of the time, acts of suicide with firearms results in a fatality 90 percent of the time.⁷ The most common method of attempted suicide, drug overdose, is fatal in less than three percent of cases,⁸ and while only six percent of all suicide attempts involve a firearm, they account for more than half of all suicide deaths nationwide.⁹

While male veterans are only 18 percent more likely than civilian counterparts to attempt suicide,¹⁰ they are much more likely to have access to a firearm when in crisis – with ownership rates as high as 75 percent among all combat veterans.¹¹ A second chance is critical because the vast majority of those who attempt suicide — a full 70 percent — will never make another attempt on their life.¹² Safely storing firearms during moments of crisis provides time and distance to lethal means, giving individuals that second chance.

Conversations around suicide can be difficult and uncomfortable, but they also save lives. We must work to both stop the stigma that makes these conversations difficult and ensure that safe storage of firearms is a part of these conversations. Thank you for the hearing today and for the priority that you and this committee places on ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,



Colleen Creighton
Director, End Family Fire
Brady: United Against Gun Violence

⁶ Ad Council Veteran Gun Suicide Prevention Campaign , Post Wave TRacking Survey report, July 2022

⁷ Conner, et al., “Suicide Case-Fatality Rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014.” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 171, no. 12 (March 2019): 885-895. <https://doi.org/10.7326/m19-1324>

⁸ Madeline Drexler, ed. “Guns & Suicide: The Hidden Toll,” *Harvard Public Health Magazine*, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, available at https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine_article/guns-suicide/

⁹ “Firearm Suicide in the United States,” Everytown for Gun Safety, August, 2019, available at: <https://everytownresearch.org/firearm-suicide/>

¹⁰ Jay Price, “Battling Depression and Suicide Among Female Veterans,” NPR, May 29, 2018, available at <https://npr.org/2018/05/29/614011243/battling-depression-and-suicideamong-female-veterans>

¹¹ E. Cleveland, et al., “Firearm Ownership Among American Veterans: Findings for the 2015 National Firearms Survey,” *Injury Epidemiology* 4 no. 33 (2017), accessed July 15, 2018, available at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5735043/pdf/40621_2017_Article_130.pdf; Adrienne J. Heinz, et al. “Firearm Ownership Among Military Veterans with PTSD: A Profile of Demographic and Psychosocial Correlates,” *Military Medicine* 181 (2016), accessed August 1, 2018, available at <https://academic.oup.com/milmed/article-pdf/181/10/1207/21832385/milmed-d-15-00552.pdf>

¹² Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, “Means Matter: Attempters’ Longterm Survival,” available at <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/survival/>