

Congressman Dean Phillips (MN-03)
Remarks for the Record
14 July 2021

House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health
Legislative Hearing

Thank you Chair Brownley, Ranking Member Bergman, and Members of the Subcommittee for allowing me to testify today in support of my bipartisan legislation, H.R.3674, the Vet Center Support Act.

Veterans, service organizations, state officials, and my own Veterans Advisory Council have consistently told me that increasing access to quality mental health care is a top priority in my home state of Minnesota and across the nation. Vet Centers, which specialize in providing readjustment counseling services to veterans, those currently serving, and their families, bring lifesaving mental health care to our communities.

Since 2011, Minnesota has had three Vet Centers. In 2021, that number remains the same. While most states have added additional centers and increased staff to address the growing needs of the veteran populations from more recent conflicts, our state has remained stagnant.

I applaud the efforts of the Vet Centers in Minnesota for their ability to serve high volumes of veterans with limited resources. However, our centers are simply overburdened and understaffed. This limits their ability to conduct the necessary outreach to underserved areas in the state. That is why I introduced H.R.3674, the Vet Center Support Act, which aims to identify gaps in mental health care coverage in states, such as Minnesota, with a ratio of one Vet Center per 100,000 or more veterans. My legislation also seeks to address barriers to opening additional Vet Centers as well as staffing them appropriately.

It is impossible to overstate the value of Vet Center services that help veterans readjust to life back home. As you know, around 17 veterans take their lives every day. Most of these veterans are not actively receiving care by the VA. Vet Centers fill the gap between the VA and private health care and has proven success in preventing veteran suicides as well as homelessness.

As a Gold Star son, I understand firsthand the sacrifices made by some so that all may enjoy the freedoms we hold dear as Americans – and so that we may continue to be blessed to live in the oldest and most successful continuous democracy in the world. Our country seems to always find the resources to send young men and women to war, but somehow cannot find the resources necessary to take care of them when they get home – this has to change.

Our veterans, servicemembers including in both the Guard and Reserve components, and their families are deserving of the highest quality mental health care. Improving access to Vet Centers and addressing barriers to sufficient staffing will not only give more veterans access to the care they deserve, but also push us one step closer to ending the scourges of veteran suicide and homelessness.

I am proud that this bipartisan piece of legislation has been endorsed by the VFW and NACVSO, and I look forward to working with the committee to advance this legislation further.