



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

May 26, 2022

The Honorable Susie Lee
U.S. Representative (NV-03)
365 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Lee,

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) is pleased to express our strong support for the bipartisan VA Zero Suicide Demonstration Project Act, and we hope that Congress will take steps to swiftly pass this vital legislation. As you know, between 2001 and 2019, the rate of suicides per day among Veterans increased nearly 5%, a concerning trend that we must address.ⁱ

Veterans are at an increased risk of suicide, and the most recent cohort of Veterans – those serving after September 11, 2001 – display higher rates of suicide than previous generations.ⁱⁱ In 2019, 6,261 Veterans in the U.S. died by suicide – representing a suicide rate 52.3% higher than for non-Veterans.ⁱⁱⁱ About 40% of Veterans who die by suicide are active patients of the VA,^{iv} and utilizing existing VA infrastructure is a logical way to reach and support Veterans who may be at risk.

The VA Zero Suicide Demonstration Project Act would utilize the Zero Suicide Initiative, a concept and program founded by the Henry Ford Health Care System, to improve care and mitigate high rates of suicide among Veterans. This legislation creates a pilot program to implement curricula that would improve Veteran safety and suicide care at five VA medical centers, one of which must be in a rural community. At each site, staff leaders will adopt a specific suicide care approach and work to create and implement training for providers to support patients at risk of suicide. This will enable the VA to demonstrate the effects of Zero Suicide programming and explore strategies that can reduce rates of suicide among its patients across the VA.

We as a country must do more to provide life-saving resources and services for those who have sacrificed to keep us safe, and we applaud your leadership on helping to reduce the rate of Veteran suicide. For further information, please contact AFSP Senior Manager of Federal Policy, Bill White (wwhite@afsp.org).

Sincerely,

Laurel Stine, J.D., M.A.
Executive Vice President and Chief Policy Officer
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

ⁱ Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2021.) *2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report*.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.