



**Paralyzed Veterans
of America**



The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
B-234 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 20515

Dear Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe:

The Senate recently passed S. 785, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act—bipartisan legislation that would expand eligibility and improve access to mental health care services for transitioning service members and veterans. Provisions in the bill will improve suicide prevention efforts to ensure those who have served will receive the assistance they need to deal with post-deployment readjustment issues and mental health conditions resulting from military service.

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) mental health services experienced tremendous growth over the past decade. Many service members returning from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan required mental health care services including treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance use disorders, depression, and anxiety. VA identified an upward trend in suicides among veterans and despite attention, significant resources and efforts to reduce suicide in the veteran population, the numbers have not decreased.

Congress has been working diligently to find new ways to ensure all veterans in crisis who need help will get the care they need. S. 785 would authorize VA to establish a grant program to help identify non-profit mental health services available in the community for isolated, at-risk veterans who are not currently served by VA. The legislation also requires an assessment of suicide prevention media outreach campaigns, policies, practices, staffing levels and programs of the VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, a staffing improvement plan for VA mental health providers and women peer specialists, as well as an assessment of Vet Center treatment programs, outreach efforts and barriers to care.

Our four organizations, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, The American Legion, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars support this comprehensive legislation and urge the House Veterans' Affairs Committee move S. 785 forward expeditiously for passage in the House. Many of our nation's veterans are struggling with mental health issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic and should not have to wait to

get the care they need. Our organizations are counting on Congress to act swiftly and pass, without delay, S. 785, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, to ensure enhanced programs and resources for VA mental health services and specialized programs for our nation's veterans and transitioning service members. We appreciate your consideration of our request.

Respectfully,



EDWARD R. REESE, JR.
Executive Director
Washington Headquarters
DAV (Disabled American Veterans)



CARL BLAKE
Executive Director
Paralyzed Veterans of America



CHANIN NUNTAVONG
Executive Director
Government Affairs
The American Legion



VINCENT "BJ" LAWRENCE
Executive Director
Veterans of Foreign Wars