

## **Statement for the Record**

Committee on Veterans' Affairs Legislative Hearing  
Thursday, September 10, 2020, at 10:00 a.m

### **Rep. Tom Malinowski (NJ-7)**

*H.R.8108 - VA Serious Mental Health Act*

“One of my greatest honors in Congress has been ensuring that our federal government provides for those who have answered the sacred call to go where our country sends them. I’m intimately aware of the sacrifices made by so many both during and after our nation’s wars—my father served in the U.S. Army in Europe and my grandfather perished fighting with the Polish Army during World War II.

As we saw after that war and our country’s more recent conflicts, the wounds don’t stop when the battle ends. As this committee knows well, some of our communities’ veterans carry invisible mental wounds and burdens years after they’ve laid down the uniform. As I’ve met with veterans across our community—through the VFW, the American Legion, and other local vets’ organizations—I’ve received a consistent message of concern about these mental health issues.

So I’m proud to lead this bipartisan legislation with Rep. Neal Dunn, ensuring that the Veterans Affairs Administration deals more effectively with serious mental illness among vets. Across the United States, hundreds of thousands of vets have been diagnosed with a serious mental illness and this legislation will push the VA to ensure that best practices for treatment are shared across its medical facilities.

The VA Serious Mental Health Act would require the VA to establish a working group to review how the VA and its practitioners address mental, behavioral, and emotional disorders. It would also require the development and implementation of new clinical guidelines for the treatment of serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, persistent mood disorder, and other relevant serious disorders.

My own district in New Jersey is home to over 30,000 veterans, many of whom depend on the VA’s healthcare and mental health programs. Some 60-70 vets commit suicide in New Jersey every year. Nationwide, more young veterans have taken their lives since 2001 than have fallen in our nation’s wars. Better diagnosing and caring for vets with mental illness is a key step in preventing suicide—so this bill is just one small step in the efforts this committee and Congress must take to address this mental health crisis. I do want to thank Chairman Takano and the House Veterans Affairs Committee on their aggressive approach to tackling vets mental health issues during this Congress—even in the midst of a debilitating pandemic. And thank you for taking the time to consider my bipartisan bill.

Finally, I want to close by just emphasizing that military veterans are not uniquely susceptible to mental health problems. It’s just that we owe them everything we can offer to keep them on their feet. My district in New Jersey—just like others across the country—benefits immensely from the experience, hard work, dedication, and stability vets bring to our community. The United States simply can’t afford to *not* do everything we can to take care of them.”