



# Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Outreach to Support Veterans' Mental Health

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Statement of

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For the Record

United States Senate  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

With Respect To

**Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Outreach to Support Veterans' Mental Health**

Washington, D.C.

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and members of the committee, on behalf of the men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and its Auxiliary, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our views on legislation pending before this committee.

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## **S. 609, Building Resources and Access for Veterans' Mental Health Engagement (BRAVE) Act of 2025**

The VFW supports this legislation to enhance mental health services for veterans. This comprehensive approach includes improvements to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) workforce capabilities, upgrades to infrastructure, targeted initiatives for women veterans, and expansion of critical suicide prevention programs. Strengthening and expanding Vet Centers and outreach programs would ensure veterans have better access to vital mental health resources.

Women veterans encounter unique mental health challenges, but there is little research on the impact of military service on women and their mental health. This legislation would build on VA programs like Recovery Engagement and Coordination for Health – Veterans Enhanced Treatment (REACH VET) that analyze risk factors for veteran suicide and incorporate additional factors specific to women. This would help to effectively identify more at-risk veterans, connect them with the resources they need, and lower suicide rates in women veterans.

The VFW encourages Congress to look for additional ways to improve suicide prevention efforts for all underserved veteran populations. Moreover, improving the infrastructure and technology within the Veterans Health Administration would undoubtedly improve VA's service delivery and responsiveness to veterans' needs. The legislation also includes a comprehensive study of VA suicide prevention and mental health outreach programs, and a report on the effectiveness of VA and Department of Defense programs that connect transitioning service members to mental health services. These reviews are key to obtaining the data necessary to assess the successes of the programs and where adjustments should be made.

## **Helping Optimize Prevention and Engagement (HOPE) for Heroes Act of 2025**

The VFW supports this legislation to improve access to mental health programs for veterans

by increasing funding for VA's Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program, introducing performance-based funding metrics, mandating standardized screening methods using the Columbia Protocol, and ensuring better coordination with local services. The bill authorizes an increase from \$750,000 to \$1 million in funding and extends the program's duration to 2030. The legislation also includes training for VA employees and provides transportation assistance for veterans attending VA appointments. These measures aim to improve access to mental health resources and reduce suicide rates among veterans.

## **Every State Counts for Vets Mental Health Act**

The VFW supports this legislation to require VA to prioritize the distribution of suicide prevention grants to states that have not yet received such grants. Currently, this would apply to North Dakota and Delaware. Veterans in rural locations often encounter difficulties accessing services due to long travel distances to medical centers and unreliable internet connections for telehealth. There should be a focused effort to provide grants to organizations that support veterans in these areas. While the goal of this legislation is to provide suicide prevention grants in all states, the current eligibility requirements and application process is essential to ensure that potential grantees meet the necessary qualifications. The distribution of grants to all states should never be at the expense of lowering the standards of the services provided to veterans. The VFW appreciates that this legislation would simply provide additional consideration to states without grants.

## **S. 793, To amend the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 to modify and reauthorize the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs**

The VFW supports this legislation to update and extend the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program through 2028. It would increase the maximum grant amount to \$1.25 million, and enhance oversight to align with the program's goals. Additionally, it would improve coordination with local VA centers, ensure congressional accountability, and integrate lessons learned from evaluations and reports. The bill authorizes \$285 million in funding for 2026 to 2028. It also grants VA greater flexibility in selecting partners, and introduces new performance measures. Additionally, the bill shifts the coordination of this suicide prevention effort from the original presidential task force to

the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and makes a technical correction in the current law regarding eligible individuals.

In conclusion, making improvements to the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program is essential for ensuring the program's effectiveness in the unique communities it serves. The VFW recommends that these pieces of legislation come together in a comprehensive package to more fully enhance veteran suicide prevention efforts.

Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Blumenthal, this concludes my statement. Again, thank you for the opportunity to offer our comments on this issue to the committee.