

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 327

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a comprehensive program designed to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 9, 2007

Mr. BOSWELL (for himself, Mr. KIND, Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, Mr. LIPINSKI, Mr. HINCHEY, Mr. ENGEL, Mr. ROSS, Mr. WEINER, Ms. WOOLSEY, Mr. SCHIFF, Mr. LINCOLN DAVIS of Tennessee, Mrs. CAPPS, Mr. BRADY of Pennsylvania, Mr. GUTIERREZ, Mrs. LOWEY, Mr. LANTOS, Ms. SCHWARTZ, Mr. MEEKS of New York, Mr. ORTIZ, Mr. NEAL of Massachusetts, Mr. MCGOVERN, Mr. RAHALL, Mr. SPRATT, Mr. BOUCHER, Mr. HONDA, Ms. MATSUI, Mr. MCINTYRE, Ms. WATERS, Mr. CRAMER, Mr. MOLLOHAN, Mr. WEXLER, Mr. MILLER of North Carolina, Mr. CROWLEY, Ms. MCCOLLUM of Minnesota, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Mr. MOORE of Kansas, Mr. RUPPERSBERGER, Mr. OLVER, Mr. COSTELLO, Mr. POMEROY, Mr. SALAZAR, Mrs. NAPOLITANO, Mr. LATHAM, Mr. MICHAUD, Mrs. MALONEY of New York, Mr. LANGEVIN, Mr. PASCRELL, Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York, Mr. STARK, Mr. EDWARDS, Mr. MORAN of Virginia, Mr. KING of Iowa, Mr. BERMAN, Mr. ETHERIDGE, Mr. LOEBSACK, Mr. MARSHALL, Mr. FILNER, Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida, Mr. MCDERMOTT, Mr. BRALEY of Iowa, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. LARSON of Connecticut, Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California, Mr. BAIRD, Mr. WATT, Mr. SHERMAN, Mr. TAYLOR, Mr. CHANDLER, Mr. BERRY, Mr. HOLDEN, Mr. DONNELLY, Mr. HILL, Mr. BOYD of Florida, Mr. CARDOZA, Mr. MELANCON, Ms. HARMAN, Ms. BEAN, Mr. PETERSON of Minnesota, Mr. BACA, Mr. COSTA, Mr. MATHESON, Mr. BARROW, Mr. SCOTT of Georgia, Mr. SHULER, Mr. WILSON of Ohio, Mr. PATRICK MURPHY of Pennsylvania, Ms. HERSETH, Mr. MAHONEY of Florida, Mr. ELLSWORTH, Mr. HAYES, and Mr. WAMP) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a comprehensive program designed to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Joshua Omgig Vet-
5 erans Suicide Prevention Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

7 It is the sense of Congress that—

8 (1) suicide among veterans suffering from post-
9 traumatic stress disorder (in this section referred to
10 as “PTSD”) is a serious problem; and

11 (2) the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should
12 take into consideration the special needs of veterans
13 suffering from PTSD and the special needs of elder-
14 ly veterans who are at high risk for depression and
15 experience high rates of suicide in developing and
16 implementing the comprehensive program under this
17 Act.

18 **SEC. 3. COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR SUICIDE PREVEN-**
19 **TION AMONG VETERANS.**

20 The Secretary of Veterans Affairs (in this Act re-
21 ferred to as the “Secretary”) shall develop and carry out

1 a comprehensive program designed to reduce the incidence
2 of suicide among veterans. The program shall incorporate
3 the components described in section 4.

4 **SEC. 4. COMPONENTS OF PROGRAM.**

5 (a) **STAFF EDUCATION.**—In carrying out the com-
6 prehensive program under section 3, the Secretary shall
7 provide for mandatory training for appropriate staff and
8 contractors (including all medical personnel) of the De-
9 partment of Veterans Affairs who interact with veterans.
10 This training shall cover information appropriate to the
11 duties being performed by such staff and contractors. The
12 training shall include information on—

- 13 (1) recognizing risk factors for suicide;
- 14 (2) proper protocols for responding to crisis sit-
15 uations involving veterans who may be at high risk
16 for suicide; and
- 17 (3) best practices for suicide prevention.

18 (b) **SCREENING OF VETERANS RECEIVING MEDICAL**
19 **CARE.**—In carrying out the comprehensive program, the
20 Secretary shall provide for screening of veterans who re-
21 ceive medical care at a Department of Veterans Affairs
22 medical facility (including a center established under sec-
23 tion 1712A of title 38, United States Code) for risk fac-
24 tors for suicide.

1 (c) TRACKING OF VETERANS.—In carrying out the
2 comprehensive program, the Secretary shall provide for
3 appropriate tracking of veterans.

4 (d) COUNSELING AND TREATMENT OF VETERANS.—
5 In carrying out the comprehensive program, the Secretary
6 shall provide for referral of veterans at risk for suicide
7 for appropriate counseling and treatment.

8 (e) DESIGNATION OF SUICIDE PREVENTION COUN-
9 SELORS.—In carrying out the comprehensive program, the
10 Secretary shall designate a suicide prevention counselor at
11 each Department of Veterans Affairs medical facility other
12 than centers established under section 1712A of title 38,
13 United States Code. Each counselor shall work with local
14 emergency rooms, police departments, mental health orga-
15 nizations, and veterans service organizations to engage in
16 outreach to veterans and improve the coordination of men-
17 tal health care to veterans.

18 (f) BEST PRACTICES RESEARCH.—In carrying out
19 the comprehensive program, the Secretary shall provide
20 for research on best practices for suicide prevention
21 among veterans. Research shall be conducted under this
22 subsection in consultation with the heads of the following
23 entities:

24 (1) The Department of Health and Human
25 Services.

1 (2) The National Institute of Mental Health.

2 (3) The Substance Abuse and Mental Health
3 Services Administration.

4 (4) The Centers for Disease Control and Pre-
5 vention.

6 (g) SEXUAL TRAUMA RESEARCH.—In carrying out
7 the comprehensive program, the Secretary shall provide
8 for research on mental health care for veterans who have
9 experienced sexual trauma while in military service. The
10 research design shall include consideration of veterans of
11 a reserve component.

12 (h) 24-HOUR MENTAL HEALTH CARE.—In carrying
13 out the comprehensive program, the Secretary shall pro-
14 vide for mental health care availability to veterans on a
15 24-hour basis.

16 (i) HOTLINE.—In carrying out the comprehensive
17 program, the Secretary may provide for a toll-free hotline
18 for veterans to be staffed by appropriately trained mental
19 health personnel and available at all times.

20 (j) OUTREACH AND EDUCATION FOR VETERANS AND
21 FAMILIES.—In carrying out the comprehensive program,
22 the Secretary shall provide for outreach to and education
23 for veterans and the families of veterans, with special em-
24 phasis on providing information to veterans of Operation
25 Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom and the

1 families of such veterans. Education to promote mental
2 health shall include information designed to—

3 (1) remove the stigma associated with mental
4 illness;

5 (2) encourage veterans to seek treatment and
6 assistance for mental illness;

7 (3) promote skills for coping with mental ill-
8 ness; and

9 (4) help families of veterans with—

10 (A) understanding issues arising from the
11 readjustment of veterans to civilian life;

12 (B) identifying signs and symptoms of
13 mental illness; and

14 (C) encouraging veterans to seek assist-
15 ance for mental illness.

16 (k) PEER SUPPORT COUNSELING PROGRAM.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the com-
18 prehensive program, the Secretary shall establish
19 and carry out a peer support counseling program,
20 under which veterans shall be permitted to volunteer
21 as peer counselors—

22 (A) to assist other veterans with issues re-
23 lated to mental health and readjustment; and

24 (B) to conduct outreach to veterans and
25 the families of veterans.

1 (2) TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS.—In carrying
2 out the peer support counseling program under this
3 subsection, the Secretary shall provide adequate
4 training for peer counselors.

5 (1) OTHER COMPONENTS.—In carrying out the com-
6 prehensive program, the Secretary may provide for other
7 actions to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans
8 that the Secretary deems appropriate.

9 **SEC. 5. REPORT TO CONGRESS.**

10 (a) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than 90 days
11 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
12 shall submit a report to Congress.

13 (b) CONTENTS OF REPORT.—The report shall con-
14 tain the following:

15 (1) Information on the status of the implemen-
16 tation of the program developed pursuant to section
17 3.

18 (2) Information on the time line and costs for
19 complete implementation of the program within two
20 years.

21 (3) A plan for additional programs and activi-
22 ties designed to reduce the occurrence of suicide
23 among veterans.

24 (4) Recommendations for further legislation or
25 administrative action that the Secretary considers

- 1 appropriate to improve suicide prevention programs
- 2 within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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