

Union Calendar No. 26

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 327

[Report No. 110-55]

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

MARCH 20, 2007

Additional sponsors: Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts, Mr. RENZI, Mrs. TAUSCHER, Mr. GRIJALVA, Ms. LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ of California, Mr. WAXMAN, Mr. TIERNEY, Mr. CAPUANO, Ms. BERKLEY, Mr. ALLEN, Mr. HARE, Mr. PERLMUTTER, Mr. PRICE of North Carolina, Mr. KUCINICH, Mr. ISRAEL, Mr. KAGEN, Mr. KLEIN of Florida, Mr. WALZ of Minnesota, Mr. MCCAUL of Texas, Ms. CASTOR, Mr. CUELLAR, Mr. DELAHUNT, Mr. LEVIN, Mr. BLUMENAUER, Mr. MANZULLO, Mr. GORDON of Tennessee, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. KILDEE, Ms. DELAURO, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. ALTMIRE, Mr. JEFFERSON, Mr. RAMSTAD, Mr. COHEN, Mr. ELLISON, Mr. ACKERMAN, Mr. VISCLOSKY, Ms. BORDALLO, Mr. STUPAK, Ms. DEGETTE, Mr. ABERCROMBIE, Mr. KLINE of Minnesota, Mr. CARNEY, Mr. CONYERS, Mr. OBERSTAR, Mrs. BOYDA of Kansas, Mr. HALL of New York, Mrs. CAPITO, Mrs. MCMORRIS RODGERS, Mr. WU, Mr. BOOZMAN, Mr. SPACE, Mr. MITCHELL, Mr. BUYER, Mr. STEARNS, Mr. MILLER of Florida, Mr. LAMBORN, Mr. BILIRAKIS, Mr. BUCHANAN, Mr. MCNERNEY, Mr. TIM MURPHY of Pennsylvania, and Mr. SOUDER

MARCH 20, 2007

Reported with amendments, committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, and ordered to be printed

[Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in italic]

[For text of introduced bill, see copy of bill as introduced on January 9, 2007]

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 Omvig Veterans*
 5 *Suicide Prevention Act”.*

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

7 *It is the sense of Congress that—*

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

4 (2) *the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should take*
5 *into consideration the special needs of veterans suf-*
6 *fering from PTSD and the special needs of elderly*
7 *veterans who are at high risk for depression and expe-*
8 *rience high rates of suicide in developing and imple-*
9 *menting the comprehensive program under this Act.*

10 **SEC. 3. COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR SUICIDE PREVEN-**
11 **TION AMONG VETERANS.**

12 (a) *IN GENERAL.*—

13 (1) *COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR SUICIDE*
14 *PREVENTION AMONG VETERANS.*—*Chapter 17 of title*
15 *38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the*
16 *end the following new section:*

17 **“§ 1720F. Comprehensive program for suicide preven-**
18 **tion among veterans**

19 “(a) *ESTABLISHMENT.*—*The Secretary shall develop*
20 *and carry out a comprehensive program designed to reduce*
21 *the incidence of suicide among veterans incorporating the*
22 *components described in this section.*

23 “(b) *STAFF EDUCATION.*—*In carrying out the com-*
24 *prehensive program under this section, the Secretary shall*
25 *provide for mandatory training for appropriate staff and*

1 *contractors (including all medical personnel) of the Depart-*
2 *ment who interact with veterans. This training shall cover*
3 *information appropriate to the duties being performed by*
4 *such staff and contractors. The training shall include infor-*
5 *mation on—*

6 “(1) *recognizing risk factors for suicide;*

7 “(2) *proper protocols for responding to crisis sit-*
8 *uations involving veterans who may be at high risk*
9 *for suicide; and*

10 “(3) *best practices for suicide prevention.*

11 “(c) *SCREENING OF VETERANS RECEIVING MEDICAL*
12 *CARE.—In carrying out the comprehensive program, the*
13 *Secretary shall provide for screening of veterans who receive*
14 *medical care at a Department medical facility (including*
15 *a center established under section 1712A of this title) for*
16 *risk factors for suicide.*

17 “(d) *TRACKING OF VETERANS.—In carrying out the*
18 *comprehensive program, the Secretary shall provide for ap-*
19 *propriate tracking of veterans.*

20 “(e) *COUNSELING AND TREATMENT OF VETERANS.—*
21 *In carrying out the comprehensive program, the Secretary*
22 *shall provide for referral of veterans at risk for suicide for*
23 *appropriate counseling and treatment.*

24 “(f) *DESIGNATION OF SUICIDE PREVENTION COUN-*
25 *SELORS.—In carrying out the comprehensive program, the*

1 *Secretary shall designate a suicide prevention counselor at*
2 *each Department medical facility other than centers estab-*
3 *lished under section 1712A of this title. Each counselor shall*
4 *work with local emergency rooms, police departments, men-*
5 *tal health organizations, and veterans service organizations*
6 *to engage in outreach to veterans and improve the coordina-*
7 *tion of mental health care to veterans.*

8 “(g) *BEST PRACTICES RESEARCH.—In carrying out*
9 *the comprehensive program, the Secretary shall provide for*
10 *research on best practices for suicide prevention among vet-*
11 *erans. Research shall be conducted under this subsection in*
12 *consultation with the heads of the following entities:*

13 “(1) *The Department of Health and Human*
14 *Services.*

15 “(2) *The National Institute of Mental Health.*

16 “(3) *The Substance Abuse and Mental Health*
17 *Services Administration.*

18 “(4) *The Centers for Disease Control and Pre-*
19 *vention.*

20 “(h) *SEXUAL TRAUMA RESEARCH.—In carrying out*
21 *the comprehensive program, the Secretary shall provide for*
22 *research on mental health care for veterans who have experi-*
23 *enced sexual trauma while in military service. The research*
24 *design shall include consideration of veterans of a reserve*
25 *component.*

1 “(i) *24-HOUR MENTAL HEALTH CARE.*—*In carrying*
2 *out the comprehensive program, the Secretary shall provide*
3 *for mental health care availability to veterans on a 24-hour*
4 *basis.*

5 “(j) *HOTLINE.*—*In carrying out the comprehensive*
6 *program, the Secretary may provide for a toll-free hotline*
7 *for veterans to be staffed by appropriately trained mental*
8 *health personnel and available at all times.*

9 “(k) *OUTREACH AND EDUCATION FOR VETERANS AND*
10 *FAMILIES.*—*In carrying out the comprehensive program,*
11 *the Secretary shall provide for outreach to and education*
12 *for veterans and the families of veterans, with special em-*
13 *phasis on providing information to veterans of Operation*
14 *Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom and the*
15 *families of such veterans. Education to promote mental*
16 *health shall include information designed to—*

17 “(1) *remove the stigma associated with mental*
18 *illness;*

19 “(2) *encourage veterans to seek treatment and*
20 *assistance for mental illness;*

21 “(3) *promote skills for coping with mental ill-*
22 *ness; and*

23 “(4) *help families of veterans with—*

24 “(A) *understanding issues arising from the*
25 *readjustment of veterans to civilian life;*

1 “(B) identifying signs and symptoms of
2 mental illness; and

3 “(C) encouraging veterans to seek assistance
4 for mental illness.

5 “(l) PEER SUPPORT COUNSELING PROGRAM.—(1) In
6 carrying out the comprehensive program, the Secretary
7 shall establish and carry out a peer support counseling pro-
8 gram, under which veterans shall be permitted to volunteer
9 as peer counselors—

10 “(A) to assist other veterans with issues re-
11 lated to mental health and readjustment; and

12 “(B) to conduct outreach to veterans and
13 the families of veterans.

14 “(2) In carrying out the peer support counseling pro-
15 gram under this subsection, the Secretary shall provide ade-
16 quate training for peer counselors.

17 “(m) OTHER COMPONENTS.—In carrying out the com-
18 prehensive program, the Secretary may provide for other
19 actions to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans
20 that the Secretary deems appropriate.”.

21 (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-
22 tions at the beginning of such chapter is amended by
23 adding at the end the following new item:

“1720F. Comprehensive program for suicide prevention among veterans.”.

24 (b) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—

1 (1) *REPORT REQUIRED.*—Not later than 90 days
2 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
3 retary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a
4 report on the comprehensive program under section
5 1720A of title 38, United States Code, as added by
6 subsection (a).

7 (2) *CONTENTS OF REPORT.*—The report shall
8 contain the following:

9 (A) *Information on the status of the imple-*
10 *mentation of such program.*

11 (B) *Information on the time line and costs*
12 *for complete implementation of the program*
13 *within two years.*

14 (C) *A plan for additional programs and ac-*
15 *tivities designed to reduce the occurrence of sui-*
16 *cide among veterans.*

17 (D) *Recommendations for further legislation*
18 *or administrative action that the Secretary con-*
19 *siders appropriate to improve suicide prevention*
20 *programs within the Department of Veterans Af-*
21 *fairs.*

Amend the title so as to read: “A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a comprehensive program designed to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans.”.

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