

**Calendar No. 279**

110TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

**S. 479****Report No. 110-132**

To reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans.

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**IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES**

FEBRUARY 1, 2007

Mr. HARKIN (for himself, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mr. ROCKEFELLER, Ms. SNOWE, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. SMITH, Mr. LAUTENBERG, Mr. THUNE, Mr. KERRY, Mr. BROWNBACK, Mr. SCHUMER, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. REID, Mr. BROWN, Mrs. CLINTON, Mr. VOINOVICH, Mr. COLEMAN, Ms. CANTWELL, Mr. CHAMBLISS, Mr. BAUCUS, Mr. DOMENICI, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. OBAMA, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. DORGAN, Mrs. LINCOLN, Mr. AKAKA, Mr. JOHNSON, Mr. STEVENS, Ms. MIKULSKI, Mr. BIDEN, and Mr. ENZI) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

JULY 23, 2007

Reported by Mr. Akaka, without amendment

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**A BILL**

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,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2       This Act may be cited as the “Joshua Omvig Vet-  
3 erans Suicide Prevention Act”.

4 **SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

5       It is the sense of Congress that—

6           (1) suicide among veterans suffering from post-  
7 traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a serious prob-  
8 lem; and

9           (2) the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should  
10 take into consideration the special needs of veterans  
11 suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder in de-  
12 veloping and implementing the comprehensive pro-  
13 gram required by section 3(a).

14 **SEC. 3. COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR SUICIDE PREVEN-**  
15 **TION AMONG VETERANS.**

16       (a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Vet-  
17 erans Affairs shall develop and implement a comprehen-  
18 sive program for reducing the incidence of suicide among  
19 veterans.

20       (b) PROGRAM ELEMENTS.—

21           (1) DE-STIGMATIZING MENTAL HEALTH.—The  
22 program required by subsection (a) shall include a  
23 national mental health campaign to increase aware-  
24 ness in the veteran community that mental health is  
25 essential to overall health and that very effective

1 modern treatments can promote recovery from men-  
2 tal illness. The campaign may include the following:

3 (A) Activities targeted at veterans of Oper-  
4 ation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring  
5 Freedom and the families of such veterans.

6 (B) Monthly messages on the Internet  
7 website of the Department of Veterans Affairs  
8 that express the theme that mental health is es-  
9 sential to overall health.

10 (C) Inclusion of the theme described in  
11 subparagraph (B) in public addresses, speeches,  
12 and veterans service organization convention  
13 addresses by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
14 and other senior officials of the Department.

15 (2) TRAINING OF EMPLOYEES AND OTHER PER-  
16 SONNEL.—The program shall provide for mandatory  
17 training on suicide and suicide prevention for appro-  
18 priate employees and contractor personnel (including  
19 all medical personnel) of the Department of Vet-  
20 erans Affairs who interact with veterans. Such train-  
21 ing shall include information pertinent to the job of  
22 such employees and personnel, including information  
23 on the following:

24 (A) Recognition of risk factors for suicide.

1 (B) Protocols for responding to crisis situ-  
 2 ations involving veterans who may be at high  
 3 risk for suicide.

4 (C) Best practices for suicide prevention.

5 (3) FAMILY EDUCATION AND OUTREACH.—The  
 6 program shall include programs of outreach to, and  
 7 education for, veterans and families of veterans (in-  
 8 cluding, in particular, veterans of Operation Iraqi  
 9 Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom and the  
 10 families of such veterans) in order to assist the fam-  
 11 ily members of veterans in—

12 (A) eliminating or overcoming stigmas as-  
 13 sociated with mental illness;

14 (B) understanding issues that arise in the  
 15 readjustment of veterans to civilian life;

16 (C) identifying signs and symptoms of  
 17 mental health problems; and

18 (D) encouraging veterans to seek assist-  
 19 ance for such problems.

20 (4) PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM.—

21 (A) IN GENERAL.—The program shall pro-  
 22 vide support for the development of a program  
 23 to enable veterans to serve as peer counselors  
 24 to—

1 (i) assist other veterans with mental  
2 health issues; and

3 (ii) conduct outreach to veterans and  
4 families of veterans on mental health mat-  
5 ters.

6 (B) TRAINING.—The program supported  
7 by subparagraph (A) shall include appropriate  
8 training for peer counselors under the program,  
9 including training in the identification of risk  
10 factors for suicide.

11 (C) PEER SUPPORT COUNSELING AS SUP-  
12 PLEMENTAL SERVICE.—The program supported  
13 by subparagraph (A) shall be offered in addi-  
14 tion to other mental health services already of-  
15 fered by the Department and services created  
16 pursuant to this Act.

17 (5) HEALTH ASSESSMENTS OF VETERANS.—  
18 The program shall encourage all veterans, when they  
19 apply for benefits provided by the Department, to  
20 undergo a mental health assessment at a Depart-  
21 ment of Veterans Affairs medical facility (including  
22 a center established under section 1712A of title 38,  
23 United States Code).

24 (6) COUNSELING AND TREATMENT OF VET-  
25 ERANS.—The program shall provide for referrals to

1 appropriate counseling and treatment programs for  
2 veterans who show signs or symptoms of mental  
3 health problems.

4 (7) SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNSELORS.—The  
5 program shall provide for the designation of a sui-  
6 cide prevention counselor at each Department of  
7 Veterans Affairs medical facility other than centers  
8 established under section 1712A of title 38, United  
9 States Code. Each counselor shall work with local  
10 emergency rooms, law enforcement agencies, local  
11 mental health organizations, and veterans service or-  
12 ganizations to engage in outreach to veterans to in-  
13 form them of mental health services that are avail-  
14 able to them and to improve the coordination of  
15 mental health care to veterans at the local level.

16 (8) RESEARCH ON BEST PRACTICES.—

17 (A) IN GENERAL.—The program shall pro-  
18 vide for research on best practices for suicide  
19 prevention among veterans.

20 (B) STEERING COMMITTEE.—The Sec-  
21 retary of Veterans Affairs shall develop a steer-  
22 ing committee to advise the Secretary of Vet-  
23 erans Affairs on the research described in sub-  
24 paragraph (A). Such steering committee shall

1 be comprised of representatives from the fol-  
2 lowing:

3 (i) National Institute of Mental  
4 Health.

5 (ii) Substance Abuse and Mental  
6 Health Services Administration.

7 (iii) Centers for Disease Control and  
8 Prevention.

9 (9) SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT.—The pro-  
10 gram shall provide for referrals to appropriate coun-  
11 seling and treatment programs of veterans who show  
12 signs or symptoms of substance abuse.

13 (10) 24-HOUR MENTAL HEALTH CARE.—The  
14 program shall include mechanisms to ensure the  
15 availability of services for mental health care for vet-  
16 erans on a 24-hour basis.

17 (11) TELEPHONE HOTLINE.—The program  
18 may include a toll-free telephone number (commonly  
19 referred to as an “800 number”) through which vet-  
20 erans may obtain information on and referrals to ap-  
21 propriate mental health services. The telephone  
22 number shall be serviced by personnel with appro-  
23 priate mental health training, and shall be oper-  
24 ational at all times.

1           (12) OTHER ELEMENTS.—The program may  
2       provide for such other activities and programs to re-  
3       duce the incidence of suicide among veterans as the  
4       Secretary of Veterans Affairs considers appropriate.

5 **SEC. 4. REPORT TO CONGRESS ON SUICIDE PREVENTION**  
6                           **PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES.**

7       (a) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than 90 days  
8       after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary  
9       of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a report on  
10      the programs and activities of the Department of Veterans  
11      Affairs to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans.

12      (b) ELEMENTS.—The report shall include the fol-  
13      lowing:

14           (1) A description of the status of the implemen-  
15      tation of the program required by section 3(a).

16           (2) A description of the scheduled implementa-  
17      tion of the program during the two-year period be-  
18      ginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, in-  
19      cluding the costs of implementation of the program  
20      over that period.

21           (3) A plan for additional programs and activi-  
22      ties to reduce the incidence of suicide among vet-  
23      erans.

24           (4) Such recommendations for additional legis-  
25      lative or administrative action as the Secretary con-



1       siders appropriate to improve and enhance the sui-  
2       cide prevention programs and activities of the De-  
3       partment.

4       (c) CONSULTATION.—In developing the plan required  
5 by subsection (b)(3), the Secretary shall consult with the  
6 following:

7               (1) The National Institute of Mental Health.

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

10              (3) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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