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# U.S. House of Representatives

## COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

B-234 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

August 27, 2019

The Honorable Mark Takano  
 Chairman  
 Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
 U.S. House of Representatives  
 B234 Longworth House Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I write to follow-up on a request to include H.R. 3495, the Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act, on the agenda for the September 11<sup>th</sup> Subcommittee on Health legislative hearing. I share your grave concern regarding the prevalence of suicide among our nation's servicemembers and veterans and your desire to act. Inclusion of this bipartisan bill at this hearing would be a substantive step in preventing suicide among those who have served, in accordance with that desire and with what you have characterized as the highest priority of your Chairmanship.

As you well know, approximately 20 of our servicemembers and veterans have died by suicide every day since the 1990's, despite significant increases in funding and staff for mental health and suicide prevention programs over that time. Because only six of those 20 servicemembers and veterans received care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the two years preceding their death, reversing that tragic trend will require a widespread effort across public and private sectors, not just improvements with respect to suicide prevention within VA. In recognition of that, H.R. 3495 would provide grants to entities that provide an additional level of suicide prevention services to those at-risk – including outreach, health assessments, treatment, therapy, medication management, peer support, and assistance obtaining VA benefits. This would greatly expand the reach of VA's suicide prevention programs, enable more at-risk servicemembers and veterans to be identified and supported, and improve coordination among currently disparate resources aimed at the military and veteran communities.

In your press release last week following the release of a VA Inspector General report regarding the suicide of a veteran on a locked unit at the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center earlier this year, you stated that, "we cannot keep delaying action." I agree. As such, I urge you to consider H.R. 3495 at the upcoming Subcommittee on Health legislative hearing. I thank you for your prompt consideration of this request and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely

David P. Roe, M.D.  
 Ranking Member