



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
Chairman Phil Roe, M.D.

H.R. 918: The Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Health Care Act

Background:

The stresses of military combat may contribute to behaviors that result in a veteran being discharged from their military service under “other-than-honorable” (OTH) conditions. Veterans who have received an administrative discharge under OTH conditions are not currently eligible to enroll in the VA healthcare system.

During a [March 2017 hearing](#), Secretary Shulkin announced his intention to expand access to emergency mental health care for veterans with OTH discharges. Under this initiative, veterans with OTH discharges in crisis are able to contact the Veterans Crisis Line or utilize mental health care through a VA facility, but VA does not currently have the authority to refer veterans with OTH discharges to community providers.

H.R. 918, as amended, would require VA to provide an initial mental health assessment and any subsequent mental health services required to meet urgent mental health care needs to former servicemembers who would otherwise be ineligible for such services because they were discharged from military service under OTH conditions, as long as they have applied for a character of service determination, deployed to a theater of combat operations, participated in combat or were the victim of military sexual assault. VA's [2016 report on veteran suicide](#) found that 20 veterans take their lives every single day. The report also uncovered decreased rates of suicide for veterans receiving health care from VA.

The Message:

- The stresses of military combat may contribute to maladaptive behaviors which could lead to an other-than-honorable discharge.
- Veterans receiving health care from VA have a lower rate of suicide.
- We have a duty to care for veterans who may experience mental illness as a result of their service.
- This bipartisan legislation would enable veterans with other-than-honorable discharges to receive critical mental health care from VA.