

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Hearing
S.785: Leading the Way to Comprehensive Mental Health Care and Suicide Prevention for Veterans

Opening Statement of Chairman Jerry Moran
Wednesday, September 9, 2020

(As Prepared for Delivery)

“Good afternoon, everyone. The committee will come to order.

“I am pleased to have this opportunity today to hear directly from organizations that work with, represent or support millions of veterans every day. This committee has gathered today to hear from these organizations their first-hand perspective and reasons they support our comprehensive suicide prevention legislation, S.785, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act.

“Additionally, tomorrow, September 10th, is Worldwide Suicide Prevention Day, and this hearing is our opportunity to call attention to the tragedy of suicide impacting so many Americans and urge for swift passage of our legislation that will provide lifesaving measures for veterans who are at risk.

“Just yesterday I was notified of yet another veteran who died by suicide while on VA property.

“Despite years of increased investment in mental health care at VA, there is a need for a new approach that places the veteran at the center of the system, and focuses on new connections and forms of outreach. This bill achieves those goals in many ways including bolstering outreach to veterans not yet identified through organizations already serving them, directing cutting-edge research and greater data sharing, exploring alternative suicide prevention programs, and making certain there is no wrong door to accessing mental health care and suicide prevention services for our nation’s veterans.

“As we know from VA data, 14 out of the 20 veterans who die by suicide each day are not enrolled in the VA system. This bill will enable the VA to better work with and amplify the efforts of organizations already serving veterans across the country who are filling gaps, especially in rural and medically underserved areas.

“In our committee’s first markup after I became Chairman in January, we reported this bill favorably with a 17-0 vote. I was pleased to work with Ranking Member Tester and our colleagues to pass this legislation out of the Senate unanimously last month. While our country has faced unprecedented and unexpected challenges this year, we cannot lose focus on the needs of our nation’s veterans.

“I look forward to the testimony from everyone who will be taking part in today’s hearing about your organization’s reasons for supporting the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act becoming law, and how this bill will make a meaningful impact on the lives of veterans.”