



March 21, 2017

The Honorable Mike Coffman  
United States House of Representatives  
2443 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

On behalf of the Association of the United States Navy, we would like to pledge our support for H.R. 918, the Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Healthcare Act. This bill would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish mental health care to certain former members of the Armed Forces who are not otherwise eligible to receive such care.

Under this bill, the Secretary of the VA will provide former members of the Armed Forces with an initial health assessment and the mental health care services authorized by the Secretary as required to treat the urgent mental health care needs of the servicemember, including risk of suicide or harming others.

The bill defines a former member of the Armed Forces as those who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and was discharged or released except in the case of dishonorable or bad conduct discharge. While serving in the Armed Forces, the former member must have been deployed in combat area or time during which hostilities occurred, participated in or experienced such combat operations, or was a victim of physical or sexual assault.

In furnishing mental health care services to an individual, the Secretary of the VA must seek to ensure that such mental health care services are furnished in a setting that is therapeutically appropriate, taking into account the circumstances that resulted in the need of such mental health care services, and provide referral services to assist former members who are not eligible for services under this bill to obtain services from sources outside of the Department of the VA.

The Secretary of the VA along with the Secretary of the DOD will enter into a contract with an independent nongovernmental entity to carry out a study on the effect combat services has had on suicide rates and serious mental health issues among veterans. The study should compare the rate and method of suicides among veterans who have received mental health care services from the Veterans Health Administration and veterans who have not received such services from the Veterans Health Administration. The study will also compare the rate and method of suicides and the incidence of serious mental health issues among combat veterans who have served in combat and veterans who have not served in combat. The Secretary will then submit a report to Congress of the findings.

Thank you for taking an active role in such an important issue to the Military and Veteran community by working to improve the lives and careers of those who served our great nation. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns at 703-548-5800 or at michael.little@ausn.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Joseph Little" in a cursive script. To the right of the name, there are handwritten initials "ABH" and "AW (Sec)" above the letters "USNR".

Michael J. Little  
Director of Legislative Affairs