

110TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 327

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 22, 2007

Received; read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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## AN ACT

To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a comprehensive program designed 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 (in this section referred to  
8 as “PTSD”) is a serious problem; and

9 (2) the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should  
10 take into consideration the special needs of veterans  
11 suffering from PTSD and the special needs of elder-  
12 ly veterans who are at high risk for depression and  
13 experience high rates of suicide in developing and  
14 implementing the comprehensive program under this  
15 Act.

16 **SEC. 3. COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR SUICIDE PREVEN-**  
17 **TION AMONG VETERANS.**

18 (a) IN GENERAL.—

19 (1) COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR SUICIDE  
20 PREVENTION AMONG VETERANS.—Chapter 17 of  
21 title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding  
22 at the end the following new section:

23 **“§ 1720F. Comprehensive program for suicide preven-**  
24 **tion among veterans**

25 **“(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—**The Secretary shall develop  
26 and carry out a comprehensive program designed to re-

1 duce the incidence of suicide among veterans incorporating  
2 the components described in this section.

3 “(b) STAFF EDUCATION.—In carrying out the com-  
4 prehensive program under this section, the Secretary shall  
5 provide for mandatory training for appropriate staff and  
6 contractors (including all medical personnel) of the De-  
7 partment who interact with veterans. This training shall  
8 cover information appropriate to the duties being per-  
9 formed by such staff and contractors. The training shall  
10 include information on—

11 “(1) recognizing risk factors for suicide;

12 “(2) proper protocols for responding to crisis  
13 situations involving veterans who may be at high  
14 risk for suicide; and

15 “(3) best practices for suicide prevention.

16 “(c) SCREENING OF VETERANS RECEIVING MEDICAL  
17 CARE.—In carrying out the comprehensive program, the  
18 Secretary shall provide for screening of veterans who re-  
19 ceive medical care at a Department medical facility (in-  
20 cluding a center established under section 1712A of this  
21 title) for risk factors for suicide.

22 “(d) TRACKING OF VETERANS.—In carrying out the  
23 comprehensive program, the Secretary shall provide for  
24 appropriate tracking of veterans.

1       “(e) COUNSELING AND TREATMENT OF VET-  
2 ERANS.—In carrying out the comprehensive program, the  
3 Secretary shall provide for referral of veterans at risk for  
4 suicide for appropriate counseling and treatment.

5       “(f) DESIGNATION OF SUICIDE PREVENTION COUN-  
6 SELORS.—In carrying out the comprehensive program, the  
7 Secretary shall designate a suicide prevention counselor at  
8 each Department medical facility other than centers estab-  
9 lished under section 1712A of this title. Each counselor  
10 shall work with local emergency rooms, police depart-  
11 ments, mental health organizations, and veterans service  
12 organizations to engage in outreach to veterans and im-  
13 prove the coordination of mental health care to veterans.

14       “(g) BEST PRACTICES RESEARCH.—In carrying out  
15 the comprehensive program, the Secretary shall provide  
16 for research on best practices for suicide prevention  
17 among veterans. Research shall be conducted under this  
18 subsection in consultation with the heads of the following  
19 entities:

20               “(1) The Department of Health and Human  
21 Services.

22               “(2) The National Institute of Mental Health.

23               “(3) The Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
24 Services Administration.

1           “(4) The Centers for Disease Control and Pre-  
2           vention.

3           “(h) SEXUAL TRAUMA RESEARCH.—In carrying out  
4 the comprehensive program, the Secretary shall provide  
5 for research on mental health care for veterans who have  
6 experienced sexual trauma while in military service. The  
7 research design shall include consideration of veterans of  
8 a reserve component.

9           “(i) 24-HOUR MENTAL HEALTH CARE.—In carrying  
10 out the comprehensive program, the Secretary shall pro-  
11 vide for mental health care availability to veterans on a  
12 24-hour basis.

13          “(j) HOTLINE.—In carrying out the comprehensive  
14 program, the Secretary may provide for a toll-free hotline  
15 for veterans to be staffed by appropriately trained mental  
16 health personnel and available at all times.

17          “(k) OUTREACH AND EDUCATION FOR VETERANS  
18 AND FAMILIES.—In carrying out the comprehensive pro-  
19 gram, the Secretary shall provide for outreach to and edu-  
20 cation for veterans and the families of veterans, with spe-  
21 cial emphasis on providing information to veterans of Op-  
22 eration Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom  
23 and the families of such veterans. Education to promote  
24 mental health shall include information designed to—

1           “(1) remove the stigma associated with mental  
2 illness;

3           “(2) encourage veterans to seek treatment and  
4 assistance for mental illness;

5           “(3) promote skills for coping with mental ill-  
6 ness; and

7           “(4) help families of veterans with—

8                 “(A) understanding issues arising from the  
9 readjustment of veterans to civilian life;

10                “(B) identifying signs and symptoms of  
11 mental illness; and

12                “(C) encouraging veterans to seek assist-  
13 ance for mental illness.

14           “(1) PEER SUPPORT COUNSELING PROGRAM.—(1) In  
15 carrying out the comprehensive program, the Secretary  
16 shall establish and carry out a peer support counseling  
17 program, under which veterans shall be permitted to vol-  
18 unteer as peer counselors—

19                 “(A) to assist other veterans with issues  
20 related to mental health and readjustment; and

21                 “(B) to conduct outreach to veterans and  
22 the families of veterans.

23           “(2) In carrying out the peer support counseling pro-  
24 gram under this subsection, the Secretary shall provide  
25 adequate training for peer counselors.

1       “(m) OTHER COMPONENTS.—In carrying out the  
2 comprehensive program, the Secretary may provide for  
3 other actions to reduce the incidence of suicide among vet-  
4 erans that the Secretary deems appropriate.”.

5           (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-  
6 tions at the beginning of such chapter is amended  
7 by adding at the end the following new item:

“1720F. Comprehensive program for suicide prevention among veterans.”.

8       (b) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—

9           (1) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than 90  
10 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the  
11 Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Con-  
12 gress a report on the comprehensive program under  
13 section 1720A of title 38, United States Code, as  
14 added by subsection (a).

15           (2) CONTENTS OF REPORT.—The report shall  
16 contain the following:

17           (A) Information on the status of the imple-  
18 mentation of such program.

19           (B) Information on the time line and costs  
20 for complete implementation of the program  
21 within two years.

22           (C) A plan for additional programs and ac-  
23 tivities designed to reduce the occurrence of sui-  
24 cide among veterans.

1                   (D) Recommendations for further legisla-  
2                   tion or administrative action that the Secretary  
3                   considers appropriate to improve suicide preven-  
4                   tion programs within the Department of Vet-  
5                   erans Affairs.

Passed the House of Representatives March 21,  
2007.

Attest:                   LORRAINE C. MILLER,  
*Clerk.*