

# State of Vermont House of Representatives



Montpelier, Vermont

## Joint House Resolution

J.R.H. 8

Joint resolution relating to military suicides

Offered by: Representatives Higley of Lowell and Strong of Albany

Whereas, according to a January 1, 2016, report in the publication *Military Times*, of the military personnel who committed suicide in 2013, nearly two-thirds had seen a doctor within three months before taking their own lives, but fewer than one-half had a mental health diagnosis, and fewer than one-third expressed any intention to hurt themselves, and

Whereas, according to an August 2014 dispatch from the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), 8,000 veterans commit suicide annually, and this averages to 22 per day, and

Whereas, the General Assembly acknowledges and appreciates the VA's efforts to increase its resources for mental health counseling and support, including working to improve access to these services for veterans who live more than 40 miles from a VA medical center, and

Whereas, the VA has a toll-free military crisis line (1-800-273-8255) that is accessible to service members and families for suicide prevention purposes, and

Whereas, despite the VA's and the U.S. Department of Defense's (DOD) suicide prevention efforts, including Congress' recent adoption of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, the veterans suicide rate remains far too high and may even increase as more men and women in the U.S. Armed Forces return from Afghanistan, and

Whereas, military families have expressed concerns about the delays in obtaining mental health counseling appointments and brand-name prescriptions, and

Whereas, the DOD's anti-stigma campaign, "Real Warriors, Real Battles, Real Strength," brings successfully treated people out of the shadows to share their experiences, explain effective treatments for mental health concerns, and illustrate that seeking treatment will not harm a person's military career, and is promoted on a website, now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly recognizes the need for public awareness of the military suicide and veteran suicide rate, and be it further

Resolved: That the General Assembly supports the continuing efforts of the VA, DOD, and many other organizations to address mental health issues, and be it further

Resolved: That the General Assembly suggests that the following additional federal policy options be considered:

- (1) establishing a peer support outreach program for veterans;
- (2) reviewing the process for troops who receive unfavorable discharges, possibly because of behavioral problems related to PTSD/TBI; and
- (3) training mental health counselors around military acronyms and situations specific to military life to help the veteran feel more comfortable when being treated for a mental health issue, and be it further

Resolved: That the General Assembly suggests that the Vermont National Guard increase educational efforts related to mental health care services in order to reduce both the existing stigma among military personnel and veterans to seek mental health assistance and to lower future suicide rates, and be it further

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald, U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, the Vermont Congressional Delegation, Commissioner of Mental Health Paul Dupre, and Vermont Adjutant General Major General Steven A. Cray.