

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs to which was
3 referred J.R.H. 8 entitled “Joint resolution related to military suicides”
4 respectfully reports that it has considered the same and recommends that the
5 resolution be amended by striking out all after the title and by inserting in lieu
6 thereof the following:

7 Whereas, according to a January 16, 2015, report in the publication *Military*
8 *Times*, nearly two-thirds of the military personnel who committed suicide in
9 2013 had seen a doctor within three months before taking their own lives, but
10 fewer than one-half had a mental health diagnosis, and fewer than one-third
11 expressed any intention to hurt themselves, and

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

15 Whereas, the General Assembly acknowledges and appreciates the VA’s
16 efforts to increase its resources for mental health counseling and support,
17 including working to improve access to these services for veterans who meet
18 the national criteria and who live more than 40 miles from a VA medical
19 facility, and

1 Whereas, the VA has a toll-free military crisis line (1-800-273-8255) and
2 website (veteranscrisisline.net) that are accessible 24 hours per day, seven days
3 per week to service members and families for suicide prevention purposes, and

4 Whereas, despite the VA’s and the U.S. Department of Defense’s (DOD)
5 suicide prevention efforts, including Congress’s recent adoption of the Clay
6 Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, the suicide rate for our
7 men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces remains far too
8 high, and

9 Whereas, military families have expressed concerns about the consistent
10 staffing of crisis lines, access to therapy options and effective medications, as
11 well as delays in obtaining mental health counseling appointments, and

12 Whereas, the DOD’s anti-stigma campaign, “Real Warriors, Real Battles,
13 Real Strength,” features real service members who have reached out for
14 support or sought treatment for invisible wounds and are continuing to
15 maintain successful military and civilian careers, now therefore be it

16 Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

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

19 Resolved: That the General Assembly supports the continued efforts of the
20 VA, DOD, the Vermont National Guard, Vermont Vet-to-Vet, and other public
21 and private organizations to address mental health issues, and be it further

1 Resolved: That the General Assembly supports the Vermont Veterans
2 Legal Assistance Project in its work helping veterans review and appeal
3 unfavorable discharges, possibly due to behavioral problems related to
4 post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI) or both, in
5 order to qualify for, or gain access to, VA services, and be it further

6 Resolved: That the General Assembly supports that federal policies be
7 established under the authority of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for
8 American Veterans Act as follows:

9 (1) establish, support, and enhance peer support outreach programs for
10 veterans; and

11 (2) train mental health counselors around military acronyms and situations
12 specific to military life to help the veteran feel more comfortable when being
13 treated for a mental health issue, and be it further

14 Resolved: That the General Assembly requests that the Secretary of
15 Veteran Affairs designate Vermont as one of the five pilot program locations
16 identified in the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, and
17 be it further

18 Resolved: That the General Assembly strongly encourages the Armed
19 Forces and VA to establish, support and enhance peer support outreach
20 programs for the families of veterans, and be it further

1 Resolved: That the General Assembly strongly encourages the U.S. Armed
2 Forces to require a period of reintegration for returning veterans that maintains
3 unit cohesion, and be it further

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

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

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15 (Committee vote: _____)

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Representative _____

FOR THE COMMITTEE