

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