

(Washington, D.C.) – On Thursday evening, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a bipartisan amendment authored by Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ) and Rep. Jon Runyan (R-NJ) that would dedicate \$20 million to veteran suicide prevention outreach efforts.

“On an average day, America loses 18 of our veterans to suicide. These tragic deaths can be prevented – but only if veterans can access the trained, compassionate counseling they need and deserve,” Holt said. “This new funding will help the VA convey a crucial message to America’s veterans: You are not alone. If you have suffered such trauma in service to this country that you are considering suicide, America stands ready to help you.”

“It is important to provide mental health resources to our men and women in uniform, both during and after their service,” Runyan said. “These funds will provide critical outreach to our veterans that will help them avail themselves of these important resources. We can only help our veterans if they are aware of the services available, and these funds seek to increase awareness through outreach.”

The new funding would allow the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to expand upon a \$4.5 million outreach program that was established in 2011. The program provides direct advertising and social media outreach related to a range of suicide prevention efforts, including the VA’s suicide prevention hotline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Expanded outreach is critical because the VA has for years fallen short in its efforts to prevent veteran suicides. Approximately 1,000 veterans enrolled in the VA system attempt suicide each month. In May 2011, a U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that the VA has not met its constitutional obligations to prevent veteran suicides: “No more veterans should be compelled to agonize or perish while the government fails to perform its obligations,” the court wrote.

The Holt-Runyan Amendment, which passed on a voice vote, was attached to the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, an annual bill that provides funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense. The House is expected to vote on the underlying legislation later this month.

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