

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 15, 2023

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

Veterans across the country rely on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for care and support. A September 2022 interim report from America's Warrior Partnership (AWP)¹ indicates that the VA may be severely undercounting veteran suicide rates. The impact of inaccurate data can lead to inefficient resource allocation, reduced effectiveness of VA programs, and the unjustified delay or denial of vital services, ultimately harming the well-being of our nation's veterans.

Utilizing federal and state data, the AWP report reveals the veteran suicide rate may be 37 percent greater than what was reported by the VA from 2014-2018. Additionally, when combining former service members (FSM) and self-injury mortality (SIM), the AWP report finds the combined death rate would be 240 percent higher than the VA's reported suicide rate. Despite the accessibility of this data, the VA's 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report reflects that the agency's methodology for calculating these incidents remains unchanged.

These significant discrepancies are deeply concerning and suggest that those who served our country are failing to receive the care the VA promised to deliver.

Please provide answers to the following questions by August 29, 2023.

1. How does the VA account for the discrepancy between its own data and the data contained in the AWP report?
2. What steps is the department taking to ensure access to the most accurate information from states and the Department of Defense?
3. How does the VA collaborate with other federal and state agencies and organizations to collect comprehensive data on veteran suicides?
4. What efforts are being made to address the undercounting of veteran suicides and improve data collection?
5. Does the VA have any plan in place to update the methodology of its reports?
6. How does the VA engage with veteran support organizations to collaborate on suicide prevention efforts?

¹ *America's Warrior Partnership Operation Deep Dive Interim Report*, America's Warrior Partnership (September, 2022), https://e55c5558-502f-457d-8a07-a49806f5ff14.usrfiles.com/ugd/e55c55_1cd5b99bea734bb295762263a003e767.pdf.

7. How does the VA analyze suicide trends to identify high-risk groups and target interventions accordingly?
8. Are there any ongoing VA initiatives or research projects focused on understanding the root causes of veteran suicides and developing targeted prevention strategies?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress



W. Gregory Steube
Member of Congress



Jeff Van Drew
Member of Congress



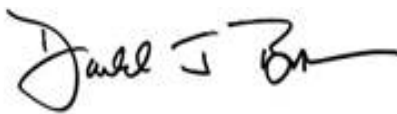
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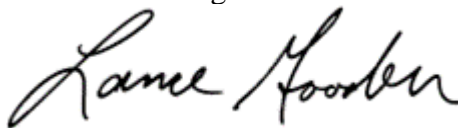
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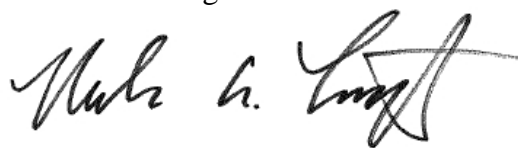
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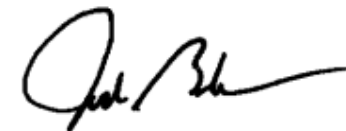
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