



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
Republicans | Ranking Member Phil Roe, M.D.

H.R. 1812: The Vet Center Eligibility Expansion Act

Background:

According to the Department of Veteran Affairs' (VA) data, approximately 20 servicemembers and veterans take their lives on any given day. Only six had sought care from VA in the two years preceding their death. Of the remaining 14, analysis indicates as many as four of those suicides occur among those who served in the National Guard or Reserve but never deployed.

VA is authorized to provide counseling through Vet Centers to veterans and servicemembers, to include members of the National Guard and Reserve, who have served on active military duty in any combat theater or area of hostility, who experienced military sexual trauma, who provided direct emergent medical care or mortuary services to casualties of war, or who served as a member of an unmanned aerial vehicle crew that provided direct support to operations in a combat zone or area of hostility, among others. However, members of the National Guard, Reserve, or Coast Guard who participated in a drug interdiction, or who served in response to a national emergency or major disaster or civil disorder declared by the President or chief executive of a state are not currently eligible to receive Vet Center care despite the serious consequences such service can have on mental health. The Vet Center Eligibility Expansion Act would correct this oversight by extending eligibility for Vet Center care to these individuals.

The Message:

- The Committee is concerned that veteran suicide rates have remained stable - at 18 to 22 veteran suicides per day since the late 1990's - despite significant increases in resources targeted towards mental health care in VA.
- This legislation would expand eligibility for counseling and care at Vet Centers to those who served in the Reserve, National Guard or Coast Guard who never deployed but served during emergency situations in the wake of disaster, civil disorder or in support of dangerous drug interdiction operations.
- The bill would extend needed mental health support to more servicemembers and, hopefully, help turn the tragic tide of suicide among the military population.