

February 9, 2021

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in support of the Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members & Veterans (SB0550/HB0872) that calls for the creation of a state fund to provide matching grants to community-based organizations providing evidence-based behavioral health treatments for service members (including the Guard and Reserves), Veterans, and their family members. There is great need for behavioral health services among Veterans, service members, and their families in Maryland.

There are approximately 399,000 Veterans living in Maryland, of which an estimated 24,000 have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Across the state, approximately 10,000 Veterans are dealing with post-traumatic stress or major depression. We know that Veterans comprise 18% of all deaths by suicide in Maryland and this group is twice as likely as non-Veterans to die by suicide. Perhaps most troubling, more than 62% of Veterans who take their own life are not under the care of the VA at the time of their death. Community-based organizations play a crucial role in providing timely, evidence-based services that fill the existing gaps in the VA system. Veterans have had a disparate impact from the isolation caused by COVID-19, so this legislation is now needed more than ever.

I know about the importance of this fight first hand, both as a suicide survivor and advocate for our Veteran Community. My time in the service saw me take the first team into the Pentagon on 9/11 to secure the perimeter and remove remains. I also deployed to Iraq and conducted over 800 convoy missions in Combat environment. Upon my return to state side, I would transition horribly and bottom out. After getting fired from my first job, evicted, divorced, and homeless I attempted to take my own life. I would spend several days locked up in the psychiatric ward in Frederick Memorial Hospital and that would begin my road to recovery.

Since then, I have founded a successful business and helped launch the non-profit, Platoon 22 that is currently slated to open our very first Veterans Services Center on Veterans day this year. This partnership between Platoon 22 and GoodWill of Monocacy Valley affords us the opportunity to see just how the numbers in the opening of this letter play out. That is why I know it is absolutely vital that we support this bill. Not only to do we owe it to warfighters, but I am proof that when help is rendered massive success can be produced. We have proven leaders in our state, let's honor our commitment to help them so we can lead on their leadership once again, if nothing else 2020 has shown us we need leaders now more than ever.

The Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program goes a long way towards solving the problem. We encourage its passage.

Sincerely,

Danny Farrar
Founder/President, Platoon 22