

October 5, 2021

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chair
Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chair
Veterans Affairs Committee
364 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mike Bost
Ranking Member
Veterans Affairs Committee
1440 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Julia Brownley
Chair
Veterans Affairs Health Subcommittee
2262 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jack Bergman
Ranking Member
Veterans Affairs Health Subcommittee
414 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Tester, Ranking Member Moran, Chair Takano, Ranking Member Bost, Chair Brownley, and Ranking Member Bergman:

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, families, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders committed to strengthening access to high-quality mental and behavioral health care, is writing to express our strong support for the **Veteran Peer Specialist Act of 2021** (S. 2386/H.R. 4575). We urge you to quickly pass this legislation so veterans across the nation can benefit from the support of a peer specialist.

Peer specialists provide veterans living with behavioral health conditions a place to build a community, share experiences, discuss coping skills, and offer hope to one another. Participation in these services are generally part of an individual's recovery and wellness plan, and works in partnership with physicians, psychologists, counselors, and other services. Research has shown that evidence-based **peer support services** improve outcomes by:

- reducing recurrent psychiatric hospitalization for patients at risk of readmission,
- improving individuals' relationship with their health care provider,
- reducing outpatient visits, and
- better engaging individuals in their course of treatment.

The **Veteran Peer Specialist Act of 2021** builds upon the success of the VA MISSION Act of 2018 by expanding the peer specialist program to every VA medical center over a five-year period by:

- initiating the program at 25 medical centers per year,
- hiring two peer specialists at each facility,
- recognizing the unique needs of female veterans, and
- ensuring diversity in the hiring of peer specialists.

The legislation authorizes \$5 million each year for five years to implement the program and ensure the VA has adequate funding to hire new peer specialists. The legislation also requires the VA to provide annual reports to Congress.

The MHLG thanks you again for your commitment to making access to peer support services widely available for all veterans who are experiencing significant behavioral health issues. We pledge our support to help you move this legislation through Congress.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Suicidology

American Association on Health and Disability

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychoanalytic Association

American Psychological Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association For Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)

Clinical Social Work Association

College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)

Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

Lakeshore Foundation

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

Mental Health America

NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals.

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability
Directors
National Association of Peer Supporters
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Federation of Families
Postpartum Support International
Recovery Innovations dba RI International
REDC Consortium
Sandy Hook Promise
SMART Recovery
The American Counseling Association
The Kennedy Forum
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
The Trevor Project
Treatment Communities of America
Well Being Trust