

# THE COMMANDER JOHN SCOTT HANNON VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH CARE IMPROVEMENT ACT



Following a decorated 23-year career with the Navy SEALs, Commander John Scott Hannon retired to his family home in Helena, Montana, where he received treatment from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for PTSD, TBI, depression, and bipolar disorder. Scott found solace and recovery in many local organizations, that allowed him to give back to his fellow veterans and his community by working with the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), animal rescue and rehabilitation, at-risk youth, and helping veterans access the outdoors. Scott died by suicide on February 25, 2018, at the age of 46.

## *Improves Access to Mental Health Care*

- Expands rural veterans' access to VA tele-mental health care.
- Requires all VA hospitals to employ at least one Suicide Prevention Coordinator.
- Establishes new Clinical Practice Guidelines to include gender-specific risk factors and treatment efficacy and efficacy of alternative therapies for the treatment of serious mental illnesses at VA and DOD.
- Creates a scholarship program for students studying counseling or social work through which they will work full-time at a Vet Center for six years following their program of study

## *Builds Upon Innovative Suicide Prevention Measures*

- Creates a VA pilot program to provide alternative treatment and therapy options such as animal, agricultural, and sports therapy.
- Requires VA to conduct an analysis of the feasibility and advisability of offering yoga, meditation, acupuncture, and chiropractic care at all VA facilities.
- Reviews the staffing levels of mental health professionals at VA facilities, and assesses the Department's hiring guidelines for these positions.

## *Helps Servicemembers Transition*

- Directs VA to work with DOD on plans to provide all servicemembers transitioning from active duty access to a full year of VA health care immediately following their discharge from the Armed Forces.
- Studies the records of each servicemember who dies by suicide within one year following their separation from DOD.
- Requires a report on joint VA and DOD mental health programs.

## *Bolsters VA's Research Efforts*

- Establishes a study into whether living at higher altitudes puts veterans at higher suicide risk.
- Invests in VA precision medicine research into identifying and treating mental illness, particularly PTSD, TBI, bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety.

## *Increases VA Accountability*

- Sets goals to study the effectiveness of VA's suicide prevention and mental health media outreach.
- Examines how VA identifies, monitors, and follows-up with high-risk patients.

The Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act is supported by:

Veterans of Foreign Wars, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Wounded Warrior Project, American Legion, Blinded Veterans Association, National Alliance on Mental Illness, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, American Chiropractic Association, California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Fleet Reserve Association, and National Board of Certified Counselors.

**This legislation passed the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on January 29, 2020, by a 17-0 vote.**