

'Bad Paper' Veterans to Finally Receive Proper Support from VA

NEW YORK, NY (March 8, 2017) – Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) applauds last night's declaration by VA Secretary David Shulkin in a Congressional hearing that his department will finally start offering mental health services for veterans with other-than-honorable discharges as soon as possible. This bold, responsible and overdue policy change at VA will change the future for thousands of veterans and their families. This change will also help ensure thousands of veterans suffering from PTSD, TBI, or related conditions get the treatment they've earned and deserve.

"This is fantastic news and a major win for the veterans community. This policy change will forever alter the future for thousands of veterans and their families. It's an outstanding move by the new VA Secretary and an important early win for him. This change shows that Sec Shulkin is someone who hears us and will take action when we need it. It's also a huge validation of the veteran community's years of activism focused on making sure none of our brothers and sisters are left behind," **said Paul Rieckhoff, Founder and CEO of IAVA.** "Over 125,000 post-9/11 veterans are estimated to have received an "other-than-honorable discharge", leaving this population without access to VA service and benefits and at a higher risk for suicide, homelessness and incarceration. For years, IAVA's innovative Rapid Response Referral Program (RRRP) has been there for many of these 'bad paper' veterans when the VA was not. We've seen the pain and struggle and worked hard to fill part of the gap—alongside so many non-profit partners. Today's decision adds critical firepower and rights a wrong. Getting every veteran the care they deserve is a critical element of America keeping it's promise to all those who risk their life to serve."

IAVA and other leading VSOs have been relentless in our fight for care for veterans with 'bad-paper' discharges for years and took it to a new level with the launch of our 'Campaign to Combat Suicide' in 2014. Last December, we celebrated the successful inclusion of the The Fairness for Veterans Act into the annual defense bill, which ensures Discharge Review Boards give liberal consideration to petitions for changes to an other than honorable discharge status if a servicemember is diagnosed with mental health injury in connection with their military service

"This overdue victory for veterans would not have happened without the fearless determination of countless key advocates—in particular, Kris Goldsmith, John Rowan, Rick Weidman and all our brothers and sisters at Vietnam Veterans of America. They courageously shared their stories and kept leading the fight alongside IAVA members and allies nationwide." **Rieckhoff continued,** "Today is a day for celebration. Tomorrow, we get back to work serving veterans. Our work to serve for this underserved population is just beginning. They will need decades of support and we will need all hands on deck ranging from VA to VSOs to philanthropy. Just like every other issue

facing veterans, victory will be only possible with a true team effort.”
If you are a veteran in need, please reach out to our Rapid Response Referral Program team (RRRP) at 855-91-RAPID or transition@iava.org for assistance.

IAVA is the leading voice of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in Washington and communities nationwide. Led by veterans, our non-partisan advocacy work ensures that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families are supported, protected and never forgotten. Since 2004, IAVA has been a juggernaut in Washington, creating and driving the national conversation on issues ranging from Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) to women veteran issues to veteran unemployment. IAVA’s dedicated staff in Washington, D.C. leads this work, advocating on behalf of our members daily. We also train our member veterans to be powerful advocates for their local community.

IAVA is focused on results and has delivered historic impacts. Every year since 2007, in an increasingly gridlocked political environment and with an extremely limited operating budget, IAVA has passed at least one major piece of groundbreaking legislation for our community ranging from the Post-9/11 GI Bill (2008), to the VOW to Hire Heroes Act (2011), to The Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act (2015).

[See IAVA’s Advocacy Program Digital Hub](#) for the full list of victories, our extensive policy recommendations and to learn more about how you can help.