

# Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Bill Introduced in Senate

**Washington D.C. (November 17, 2014)** – Today, Senators John McCain (R-Ariz.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Richard Burr (R-N.C.), Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Ala.) and Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) introduced in the Senate the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Bill of 2014, significant legislation that will help combat veteran suicide and improve access to quality mental health care. Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) – the largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization representing post-9/11 veterans and their families – spearheaded the creation of the bill and praised the Senators for their commitment to veterans.

“Now that the elections are over, before this Congress adjourns, we need real action on suicide prevention. IAVA thanks this diverse group of Senate leaders for taking initiative on this vital issue to the veteran community,” said Paul Rieckhoff, IAVA CEO and Founder. “Last week as our country celebrated Veterans Day, politicians again touted their support of veterans. Now it is time to step up.”

Rieckhoff added: “Combating veteran suicide has been a top priority for IAVA this year. When passed, this bill will ensure our veterans receive the top quality mental health care they deserve, most specifically by implementing evaluation programs to assess the success of mental health and suicide prevention programs at DoD and the VA. As one of only two combat veterans in the Senate, IAVA especially appreciates the leadership of Senator McCain. Reversing the suicide trend among veterans requires more than one helping hand. This bill empowers the VA to collaborate with VSOs and nonprofit mental health organizations to combat veteran suicide. We urge Congress to move quickly on this legislation, put partisanship aside, and pass this bill during the lame duck session. Lives are on the line. IAVA expects to see the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Bill receive expedited consideration and unanimous support in the full Senate in the coming weeks.”

Created in consultation with IAVA staff and driven by quantitative and qualitative data from IAVA’s [annual member survey](#), the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Bill will:

- Require independent evaluations of all mental health care and suicide prevention programs at the DoD and VA;
- Provide up to \$120,000 per year in student loan repayments to recruit psychiatrists who commit to VA service;
- Establish a drug take-back program for controlled substance prescription drugs at VA medical facilities; and,
- Authorize the VA to collaborate with Veteran Service Organizations and

nonprofit mental health organizations to prevent suicide among veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates 22 veterans die by suicide each day. According to IAVA's [2014 Member Survey](#), 47 percent of respondents know at least one Iraq or Afghanistan veteran who has attempted suicide, while 40 percent of respondents know someone who has died by suicide, up three points from 2013.

"An estimated 22 veterans commit suicide every day, a shocking and unacceptable reality," said Senators McCain, Blumenthal, Blunt, Burr, Murkowski and Manchin. "We are proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation to improve and modernize the suicide prevention programs and resources available to our fighting men and women. This bill will provide additional resources for veterans who suffer from mental health disorders that place them at higher risk of suicide. It will review existing suicide prevention programs to determine which ones work and get rid of those that don't, improve collaboration between the Department of Veterans Affairs and Veterans Service Organizations, and provide incentives to attract more psychiatrists to treat veterans through the VA. Our nation has a long way to go to decrease the rate of suicide among our veterans and we must do much better in fulfilling our responsibilities to care for those who have risked everything on behalf of their fellow Americans."

In July, House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) and Reps. Tim Waltz (D-Minn.) and Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.) introduced the House version of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention For American Veterans Act (H.R. 5059). Susan Selke, the mother of Clay Hunt, a Marine veteran who died by suicide, was present at the bill introduction.

Susan Selke will be testifying Wednesday morning at the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) hearing on Mental Health and Suicide Among Veterans at 10 a.m. in Russell Senate Office Building SR-418.

"No family member or friend should have to experience losing another veteran or servicemember to suicide," said Susan Selke. "Had this legislation been enacted earlier, Clay might not have fallen through the cracks. Our son could not get the help he so desperately needed and, like so many veterans, Clay was plagued with fighting through VA's bureaucratic red tape. This bill gets us one step closer to reversing the suicide trend among veterans and changing the status quo. I urge the Senate to move quickly and pass this bill. Swift action is critical, as 22 or more veterans die by suicide every single day."

IAVA urges supporters to visit [iava.org](http://iava.org) and [click take action to sign the petition to support the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention bill](#). To date, more than 43,000 people have signed the petition.

IAVA connects veterans to mental health services, including partnering with the VA's Veterans Crisis Line to ensure that every servicemember, veteran, family member and provider knows that there is free and confidential help available 24 hours a day through phone, text and online. Veterans, or those concerned about veterans, can call 800-273-8255 and press 1 to be directly connected to qualified responders.

As part of the [“We’ve Got Your Back: IAVA’s Campaign to Combat Suicide”](#) IAVA is calling on Congress to pass comprehensive legislation expanding mental health care for veterans and ensuring that they have extended access to that care.