

Senate Passes Historic Clay Hunt SAV Act

Veteran suicide prevention bill goes to President's desk for his signature

Washington D.C. (February 3, 2015) – Today, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act, critical legislation that increases access to quality mental health care and combats veteran suicide. Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), who spearheaded the bill, applauds members of the 114th Congress for the legislation's swift, bipartisan passage and calls on President Obama to honor our nation's commitment to our veterans with an urgent signing ceremony at the White House. The historic legislation is named after Iraq and Afghanistan war veteran Clay Hunt, a Marine sniper who died by suicide in 2011. More than 20 veteran service organizations and partners such as the American Psychiatric Association support the legislation.

Introduced by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), the bipartisan bill has a total of 53 cosponsors – 30 Democrats, 21 Republicans and two Independents. A full list of co-sponsors can be found [here](#).

"We are extremely grateful for the Senate passing this bill and all those who have worked so hard on it. While we are a little bittersweet, because it is too late for our son Clay, we are thankful knowing that this bill will save many lives," said Susan Selke, mother of Clay Hunt. "No veteran should have to wait or go through bureaucratic red tape to get the mental health care they earned during their selfless service to our country. While this legislation is not a 100 percent solution, it is a huge step in the right direction."

"This is a tremendous day for our community," said IAVA CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff. "For too long the crisis of veteran suicide has been hidden in the shadows. This bill gives many veterans the new hope they so desperately need and demonstrates that our leaders are willing to give veterans the care they deserve. We call on President Obama to demonstrate his commitment to our veterans with a public signing ceremony. After being blocked by a lone Senator last session, our veteran members are relieved that we are now a huge step closer to reversing the trend that has taken far too many sons, daughters, friends and loved ones from us. We thank Senator McCain and Senator Blumenthal for their leadership in combating suicide and for reintroducing this vital bill. While we are thrilled about today's vote, all of us must remember the sobering reality that necessitated this action: the invisible wounds of war and our nation's initial failure to treat them."

Earlier this month, the U.S. House unanimously passed the House version of the measure, H.R. 203, sponsored by House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) and Reps. Tim Walz (D-Minn.) and Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.).

Developed by IAVA and its allies on Capitol Hill, and driven by qualitative and quantitative data from [IAVA's annual member survey](#), the Clay Hunt SAV Act will:

Increase Access to Mental Health Care and Capacity at VA to Meet Demand

- Requires the VA to create a one-stop, interactive website to serve as a centralized source of information regarding all VA mental health services for veterans.
- Addresses the shortage of mental health care professionals by authorizing the VA to conduct a student loan repayment pilot program aimed at recruiting and retaining psychiatrists.
- Extends Combat-Eligibility for mental health care services at VA for one-year, providing for increased access for veterans that may be suffering from conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Improve the Quality of Care and Boosting Accountability at VA

- Requires evaluations of all mental health care and suicide prevention practices and programs at the VA to find out what's working and what's not working and make recommendations to improve care.

Develop a Community Support System for Veterans

- Establishes a peer support and community outreach pilot program to assist transitioning servicemembers with accessing VA mental health care services.

Over the past 10 years, IAVA has grown to become the leading advocate for veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The organization has put top issues for veterans on the map and jump-started historic changes, including passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, funding for health care at the VA, the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, efforts to combat veteran suicide, and, in 2014, a national focus on the high VA disability claims backlog.