House Passes Critical Veteran Suicide Prevention Bill

Clay Hunt SAV Act, spearheaded by IAVA, now heads to the Senate

Washington D.C. (January 12, 2015) – Tonight, the House unanimously passed the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act, H.R. 203, critical legislation that increases access to quality mental health care and combats veteran suicide. The bill, spearheaded by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), is named after Clay Hunt, a Marine veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and died by suicide in 2011.

“We thank members of the House for passing this bill and acting so definitively to help our veterans,” said Susan Selke, mother of Clay Hunt. “My husband Richard and I don’t want another veteran to go through the strains and impediments Clay faced when he sought mental health care. We hope the Senate can move quickly to pass this critical legislation so veterans can start getting the mental health care they deserve as soon as possible.”

“IAVA applauds the House for passing the Clay Hunt SAV Act, and especially thanks Chairman Miller and Reps. Walz and Duckworth for their leadership in combating veteran suicide,” said IAVA CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff. “Our country is now one step closer to changing the status quo and getting this bill on the president’s desk. We urge the Senate to move quickly in passing this bipartisan bill, which will help reverse the suicide trend among veterans. We now call on all of Washington to stand with our community. We also hope the President will focus on this bipartisan issue during the State of the Union. Time is precious as 22 veterans die by suicide each day. Not one more veteran should have to wait to get the mental health care they earned after selflessly serving their country.”

In December, the Clay Hunt SAV Act passed the House unanimously by voice vote and later died in the Senate after a single senator, now retired Senator Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), objected to its passage. House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) and Reps. Tim Walz (D-Minn.) and Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.) reintroduced the bill last week. Supporters of the bill include lawmakers from both sides of the aisle, veteran service organizations and partners such as the American Psychiatric Association and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

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 addresses the suicide crisis by:

**Increasing 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.

**Improving 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.

**Developing 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.

To support its legislative efforts, IAVA launched a petition in December after Sen. Coburn blocked the Clay Hunt SAV Act. To date, the grassroots petition currently includes more than 136,000 signatures of IAVA members and supporters. Click here to learn more.