



**Statement of Vadim Panasyuk**  
**Sr. Veteran Transition Manager, Policy Liaison & VA Benefits Lead**  
*of*  
**Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Of America**  
*before the*  
**New York City Council Joint Committee on Veterans & Mental Health**

**February 26, 2018**

Chairman Deutsch, Chairwoman Ayala and distinguished members of the Joint Committee, on behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and our more than 425,000 members, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. I am a New Yorker, a Ukrainian expatriate, a naturalized citizen, and a US Army veteran having served two tours of duty with the 3rd Infantry Division in Iraq. At IAVA, I am a masters-level social worker serving as a Senior Veteran Transition Manager (VTM), VA Benefits Lead, with our Rapid Response Referral Program - or “RRRP” for short.

RRRP is a high-tech, high-touch referral service for veterans and their families with a comprehensive case management component. We assist veterans of all eras, regardless of discharge status, worldwide in confronting significant challenges like unemployment, financial or legal struggles, homelessness, and mental health related issues. To date, RRRP has served over 9,000 veterans and family members nationwide, and over 1,000 in New York City alone, providing critical support and resources to ensure that this city's veteran's needs are effectively met.

The campaign to combat suicide among troops and veterans is an extremely important issue to IAVA and remains number one among our Big 6 priorities, which also include Support and Recognition for Women Veterans, Reforming the VA for Today’s Veterans, Defending the GI Bill, Support for Injuries from Burn Pits and Toxic Exposures, and Support for Veteran Cannabis Use.

For nearly a decade, IAVA and the veteran community have called for immediate action by our nation’s leaders to appropriately respond to this crisis of 20 military and veterans dying every day from suicide. Thanks to the courage and leadership of veterans, military family members and our allies, there has been tremendous progress. The issue of veteran suicide is now the subject of national conversation, increased media coverage, a reduction in stigma and a surge of government and private support. In 2015, IAVA and our partners jump-started a national conversation. But the flood of need continues nationwide – and continues to rise. In our latest



Member Survey, 65% of IAVA members know a post-9/11 veteran who attempted suicide. 59% know a post-9/11 veteran who died by suicide, and 77% believe that we as a nation are making progress in combating military and veteran suicide. Every day, we are losing more of our brothers and sisters to suicide. This is not the time for America to let up. Instead, this is a time to redouble our efforts as a nation and answer the call to action. And IAVA will continue to maintain our leadership on that charge.

One of the ways that IAVA will maintain our leadership on this issue is through RRRP. In 2018, we provided nearly 130 connections to mental health support for veterans and family members around the country, ensuring that those in need of help can easily access the quality support they need. Importantly, we have a memorandum of understanding with the VA's Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) which allows us to provide a warm handoff with a trained responder at the VCL, where the at-risk veteran is never left alone or hung up on, literally preventing veteran suicide. In 2018, RRRP connected 39 veterans to the VCL, which means that about every week and a half VTMs connected a veteran that was either currently suicidal or at-risk of suicide with lifesaving support. RRRP relies on this critical partnership with the VA to keep veterans and families safe by ensuring that our clients who are in crisis are connected with VCL responders to prevent suicide. IAVA's Rapid Response Referral Program and the VCL have been in partnership since RRRP launched in 2012, and has connected nearly 240 veterans to this lifesaving resource.

Members of the Joint Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to share IAVA's views on these issues today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have and working with the Committee in the future.