

MEDICAL SOCIETY of the STATE OF NEW YORK

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Division of Governmental Affairs
MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

**ON SENATE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS, HOMELAND SECURITY AND
MILITARY AFFAIRS**

S. 2248 (SANDERS)

AN ACT to create a veterans' mental health and suicide prevention task force; and providing for the repeal of such provisions upon expiration thereof

This measure would create a veterans mental health and suicide prevention task force. **The Medical Society of the State of New York supports this measure.**

According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs, veteran suicide is an urgent issue and in 2015 the rate of suicide was 2.1 times higher among veterans compared with non-veteran adults. Male veterans had a suicide rate that was 1.3 times higher compared with non-veteran males and female veterans' suicide rate was 2.0 times higher than non-veteran females. Approximately 20 veterans commit suicide every day and veterans account for 20-25% of suicides in the US. In 2015, rates of suicide were highest among younger veterans ages 18-34. Suicide rates may be under-represented by as much as 20% by current data because of certain incentives to cover up suicides and attempts including social stigma and attempts to protect family benefits.

The Medical Society of the State of New York has partnered with the New York State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-NYS) and the New York State Psychiatric Association (NYSPA), to create comprehensive statewide training program, known as the Veterans Mental Health Training Initiative (VMHTI). This program, which has been funded through a NYS Senate initiative, enables our organizations to educate both community mental healthcare providers and primary care healthcare providers on veterans-specific mental health issues including combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, suicide in veterans, substance use, military culture, and women veterans' mental health conditions including the impact military sexual trauma has had on women in the military. It also help educate physicians and other care providers on the many community resources available to help our veterans confront these health issues, such as the successful Dwyer "Peer to Peer" program. A recent study conducted by the RAND Corporation found only 20 percent of health and mental health care providers in New York State are screening their patients for a military or veteran affiliation and only one in three meet the minimum threshold for military cultural competence with a further identified need in primary and physical health care in particular. Among the study's conclusion and recommendations is the need for additional training programs, "...to increase providers' military cultural competence and knowledge of VA, as well as efforts to incentivize providers to appropriately screen veteran patients for common service-connected conditions," which collectively "could

improve the readiness of health care providers across the state as increasing numbers of veterans seek care from non-VA providers.”

The creation of this task force would lend itself to helping to identify those veterans most at risk of suicide, create greater awareness of causes and warning signs of suicide and suicidal behavior among veterans and address intervention and prevention options to reduce the number of veterans who commit suicide. **The Medical Society of the State of New York stands ready to assist the New York State Legislature in this effort and urges this measure be approved.**

**Pfc/support
4/5/2019**