

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 8, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy,

We write to request your immediate attention and passage of S.785, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act. This bipartisan legislation, sponsored by fifty-four U.S. Senators was developed with and is supported by nearly forty veterans service organizations, mental health patient advocacy groups and entities who serve veterans in communities across the nation. Expressed support from these organizations is included in an addendum to this letter. S.785 received a unanimous 17-0 vote out of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and was recently passed by unanimous consent in the U.S. Senate.

This legislation is named for Commander John Scott Hannon, a decorated Navy SEAL veteran from Montana who lost his life to the invisible wounds of war in 2018. Sadly he is not alone, as many as 20 veterans die by suicide each day, and recent research has shown that for every one death by suicide, over 115 people are directly affected and negatively impacted. Suicide is a national tragedy and these deaths are preventable if the right care, services and supports are available for our nation's veterans at-risk of suicide. S.785 puts in place the critical care, services and supports that will save veterans' lives.

Approximately 14 out of the 20 veterans who die by suicide each day are not in the VA system. This legislation makes investments in veteran-serving community organizations across the nation to reach vulnerable veterans not currently connected to VA care to provide wrap-around suicide prevention services with the VA. Additionally, the bill establishes increased accountability over the Department's mental health and suicide prevention programs, expands VA telehealth capabilities to better serve rural veterans, bolsters and expedites federal research capabilities, directs VA to embark on a precision medicine initiative that will improve how mental health conditions are diagnosed and treated, and makes necessary improvements to the VA mental health workforce.

The social isolation and increased anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated many of the issues our veterans face. Our nation's veterans and their families are waiting on Congress to take action to deliver these desperately needed resources. We must act now to provide this vital assistance to Americans who have sacrificed so much for our country and who deserve the best our nation has to offer. As such, we are seeking immediate passage of S. 785 when the U.S. House of Representatives reconvenes in September.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent request and for ensuring our veterans and their families have the critical care and support they need.

Sincerely,



Jerry Moran
Chairman



Jon Tester
Ranking Member

CC: The Honorable Mark Takano, Chairman, House Committee on Veterans Affairs
The Honorable Phil Roe, Ranking Member, House Committee on Veterans Affairs



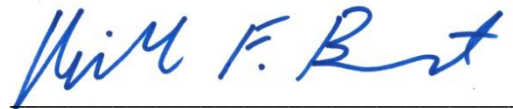
Mike Crapo
U.S. Senator



Cory A. Booker
U.S. Senator



Dan Sullivan
U.S. Senator



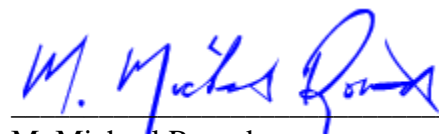
Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator



Susan M. Collins
U.S. Senator



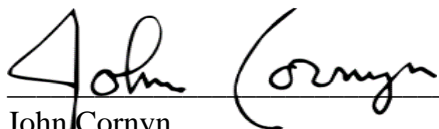
Joe Manchin III
U.S. Senator



M. Michael Rounds
U.S. Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
U.S. Senator



John Cornyn
U.S. Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen

Jacky Rosen
U.S. Senator



Kevin Cramer
U.S. Senator



Mark R. Warner
U.S. Senator



Marsha Blackburn
U.S. Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
U.S. Senator



Steve Daines
U.S. Senator



Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senator



John Boozman
U.S. Senator



Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator

/s/ Roger F. Wicker

Roger F. Wicker
U.S. Senator



Christopher A. Coons
U.S. Senator



Martha McSally
U.S. Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

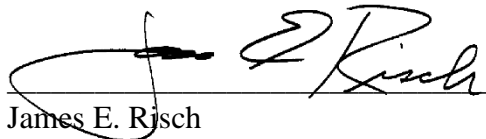
Jack Reed
U.S. Senator



John Hoeven
U.S. Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine

Tim Kaine
U.S. Senator



James E. Risch
U.S. Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
U.S. Senator



Cory Gardner
U.S. Senator

/s/ Doug Jones

Doug Jones
U.S. Senator

/s/ Rob Portman

Rob Portman
U.S. Senator



Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
U.S. Senator



Amy Klobuchar
U.S. Senator



Tina Smith
U.S. Senator