

SENATOR SARAH ELFRETH
Legislative District 30
Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Education, Business and Administration

Chair, Pensions

Senate Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 103
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3578 · 301-858-3578
800-492-7122 Ext. 3578
Fax 410-841-3156 · 301-858-3156
Sarah.Elfreth@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 2nd, 2022

**Testimony in Favor of SB709
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - Alternative Therapies Fund - Establishment
(David Perez Military Heroes Act (End 22 a Day))**

Chairman Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, and members of the Budget & Taxation Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 709 to create a fund to provide critical alternative therapies for veterans persevering and surviving with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The incidence of suicide among our veterans and active-duty military personnel have remained at a 20+ constant every day for nearly two decades. Alarming, this estimate has only increased within recent years. The suicide rate among active-duty troops has risen from 20.3 deaths-per-100,000 to 28.7 from 2015 to 2020ⁱ. It is paramount that we support and serve our active-duty service members and veterans now more than ever. Senate Bill 709 calls for the creation of a new fund to support veterans by providing access to meaningful and therapeutic treatments for PTSD.

Over the past decade, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs have conducted numerous studies on the relationships between military service, the prevalence of PTSD, and the rate of suicide within these communities. Of these studies, each found a robust correlation between PTSD and suicide for active duty service members and veteransⁱⁱ. According to a recent 2021 joint-report conducted by researchers at Brown and Boston University, the rate of suicide among active duty service members and post-9/11 veterans is outpacing the suicide rate of the civilian populationⁱⁱⁱ. Moreover, the rate at which active-duty personnel and veterans are dying by suicide (a minimum of ~30,177) far outpaces the rate at which service members have been killed in post-9/11 war operations (a minimum of ~7,057) by over 400%. Even more alarming, the U.S. military experienced an 16% increase in the number of recorded suicides from 2019 to 2020^{iv}.

The use of alternative therapies in the treatment of PTSD in active duty members and veterans has proven to be power tool in combating the ongoing suicide epidemic throughout the U.S. military. It is paramount that the state of Maryland improves access to alternative therapies for PTSD in veterans.

This legislation will:

1. Create the “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Alternative Therapies Fund” within the Department of Health

2. Allow the fund to be used to support the study of the effectiveness and improving the access to alternative therapies, including hyperbaric oxygen therapy and psychedelics, through providing cost-free access to alternative therapies.
3. Authorize the Department to work with a consortium of organizations on the uses of this fund and the effectiveness of therapies including: The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, Johns Hopkins University, University of Maryland, Maryland Sheppard Pratt, and Walter Reed Medical Center.
4. Require a report to the General Assembly on the use of the fund and any other findings.

Legislators across the country are realizing that we must make certain that every available tool is utilized to bring an end to the tragic suicide epidemic that is taking the lives of so many of our veterans. As of this testimony, seven states - including Oklahoma, Texas, Indiana, Kentucky, Arizona, Florida, and North Carolina - have passed critical legislation that provides financial support for veterans seeking alternative treatments for mental and neurological disorders, such as PTSD. Two additional states, Colorado and Idaho, are contemplating similar legislation. This battle will be won one state at a time. Now, it is Maryland's turn to act.

While the debate continues, so does the rate of suicide among our active duty service member and veteran communities. It is time that Maryland join the states listed above by enacting meaningful legislation to provide immediate access to alternative treatments. Our veterans deserve nothing less. By doing so we guarantee that every available tool is being allocated to combat and end the tragic suicide epidemic that continues to take the lives of so many of our veterans.

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 709.

ⁱ [/www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2021/09/30/military-suicides-up-15-percent-in-2020-but-officials-dont-blame-pandemic/#:~:text=The%20suicide%20rate%20among%20active,from%20up%2020.3%20in%202015.](https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2021/09/30/military-suicides-up-15-percent-in-2020-but-officials-dont-blame-pandemic/#:~:text=The%20suicide%20rate%20among%20active,from%20up%2020.3%20in%202015.)

ⁱⁱ https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/cooccurring/suicide_ptsd.asp#four

ⁱⁱⁱ [https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/Suitt_Suicides_Costs%20of%20War_June%2021%202021.pdf.](https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/Suitt_Suicides_Costs%20of%20War_June%2021%202021.pdf)

^{iv} <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2021/09/30/military-suicides-up-15-percent-in-2020-but-officials-dont-blame-pandemic/#:~:text=The%20suicide%20rate%20among%20active,from%20up%2020.3%20in%202015.>