

April, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025

Senator Bernie Moreno

Senator for Ohio

Senator Jon Husted

Senator for Ohio

Dear Members of the Senate:

My name is Katherine Shirley and I am a nursing student at Firelands Regional Medical Center School of Nursing in Sandusky, Ohio. I am writing to discuss a proposed bill that was presented on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025. My hopes are that by the end of this letter, you will be in support of this bill and move to pass it. The bill I am referring to is S. 702, the Veterans Mental Health and Addiction Therapy Quality of Care Act. This topic means a great deal to me as not only as a health care worker, but also as an American.

I am the proud daughter, sister, and wife of veterans. These men served in the military ranging from the 1980's to as late as 2021. I have witnessed what the military has done to them, not only physically but mentally, as well. To this day, my oldest brother still cannot talk about what he had gone through while overseas. He has received years of mental health services provided by the VA and continues to remain as closed off as he did when he first came back and it has been well over 10 years now that he has been home. He is one of many veterans who returned home, seeking help from the VA only to be denied the adequate care they need to try and heal. It is statistically proven that veterans are 1.5 times more likely to commit suicide than a civilian. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the most common mental health illness that plagues the veteran community. This illness can cause traumatic flashbacks, increased heart rate and blood pressure, and shortness of breath-an instant fight-or-flight response. By asking you to speak in support of this Bill, you would be showing the support in studying a way to improve the care our soldiers receive for the wounds that we cannot see.

A review by ProPublica investigated all the reports published by the VA's inspector general since 2020 and they had shown in conclusion that there had been 151 investigations that were triggered by complaints or calls regarding the lack of thoroughness regarding the Veteran-at-risk suicide screening. These reports showed there were numerous employees that had missed mandatory mental health training programs and failed to follow up with patients who were deemed suicidal. This review showed that sixteen of

these patients who were not properly screened either killed themselves or killed someone else. In 2022, there were 6,407 Veteran suicides, 232 in Ohio alone, the state in which I reside, and you represent. This means something to me. I don't know if it's possible to cure suicide, but I want to ensure that their voices are heard. All of these statistics can be found at [mentalhealth.va.gov](https://mentalhealth.va.gov) and [propublica.org](https://propublica.org).

I want you to hear me and my concerns for the safety of our veterans, Senators. This study can do nothing but benefit the men and women who served their country. They fought for our freedom, and now it's time for us to fight for their lives and overall mental health care. Please consider sponsoring this bill and allowing for this study to change the way the VA cares for our loved ones.

Katherine Shirley, Student Nurse

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