

Two Legion-backed bills addressing veteran suicide become law

The American Legion

OCT 22, 2020

On Oct. 17, President Trump signed S. 785, the “Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019” and S. 2661, the “National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020” into law. The legislation was supported by The American Legion.

“A heartbreaking truth of veteran suicide is that nearly every veteran has been touched by it in some form or fashion,” said Katie Purswell, deputy director of Health Policy for The American Legion, in her testimony Sept. 9 before the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs (SVAC) on S. 785. “The things that we have done and seen are now a part of us and affect us in ways we can have trouble understanding. From complications with assimilation into civilian life to reliving past traumatic experiences, we struggle at times to find a way to cope.”

S. 785 is named in honor of retired U.S. Navy Cmdr. John Scott Hannon, who served his country for 23 years as a leader of SEAL Team Two, a member of SEAL Team Six, and Special Operations and policy staff officer at U.S. Special Operations Command. Six years after he retired from the Navy, Hannon died by suicide on Feb. 25, 2018.

VA estimates that around 20 veterans die by suicide each day.

The law includes provisions that specifically target women veterans, as well as ones addressing the need to provide veterans with access to alternative and complementary health-care programs and expand telehealth services. The American Legion was the only major veterans service organization to testify before the SVAC on S. 785.

“Our organization understands mental health care does not have a one-size fits all solution in preventing suicide. It is a complex problem that needs be treated at an individual level as each veteran’s situation is unique,” Purswell said. “As a Legion member, and as a veteran who has been touched by this tragedy, I am proud to say The American Legion supports this bill in its entirety.”

S. 2661, the “National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020,” designates 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number of the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system. Advocates believe that designating a three-digit telephone number can transform access to mental health care.

In addition to the 9-8-8 designation, the law includes a provision for the Veterans Crisis Line. By dialing 9-8-8, veterans will have fast and easy access to veteran-specific mental health support. S. 2661 is supported by [American Legion Resolution No. 377](#).