

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4290

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to designate a week as “Battle Buddy Check Week” for the purpose of outreach and education concerning peer wellness checks for veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 11, 2019

Ms. JACKSON LEE (for herself, Mr. FITZPATRICK, Ms. BROWNLEY of California, Mr. BROWN of Maryland, and Mr. BANKS) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to designate a week as “Battle Buddy Check Week” for the purpose of outreach and education concerning peer wellness checks for veterans, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. FINDINGS; SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

4 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following find-
5 ings:

6 (1) The Department of Veterans Affairs is the
7 Federal agency charged with managing benefits and
8 health care for the Nation’s veterans.

1 (2) In recent years, the Department of Vet-
2 erans Affairs made the prevention of veteran suicide
3 among the highest priorities of the Department and
4 has developed data models to continually improve
5 and tailor suicide prevention strategies and initia-
6 tives.

7 (3) Among the recent suicide prevention initia-
8 tives are—

9 (A) an expanded Veterans Crisis Line to
10 three call centers;

11 (B) launching the S.A.V.E. suicide preven-
12 tion training video;

13 (C) implementing the Mayor’s Challenge,
14 which engages local elected officials in veteran
15 suicide prevention; and

16 (D) partnering with the Department of
17 Defense and the Department of Homeland Se-
18 curity to support veterans during their transi-
19 tion from military to civilian life.

20 (b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
21 gress that the Department of Veterans Affairs should—

22 (1) remain focused on screening transitioning
23 members of the Armed Forces for factors associated
24 with suicide and providing treatment and other serv-
25 ices needed to reduce suicides;

1 (2) undertake suicide prevention through a
2 multi-pronged strategy that addresses the many fac-
3 tors that are known to contribute to suicide;

4 (3) continue to regard suicide prevention as one
5 of the highest priorities of the Department; and

6 (4) provide guidance to other agencies and vet-
7 eran service organizations on the factors that are as-
8 sociated with suicide.

9 **SEC. 2. DESIGNATION OF BATTLE BUDDY CHECK WEEK BY**
10 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

11 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
12 shall designate one week per year to organize outreach
13 events and educate veterans on how to conduct peer
14 wellness checks, which shall be known as “Battle Buddy
15 Check Week”.

16 (b) EVENTS AND EDUCATION.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—During Battle Buddy Check
18 Week, the Secretary, in consultation with organiza-
19 tions that represent veterans, non-profits that serve
20 veterans, mental health experts, members of the
21 Armed Forces, and such other entities and individ-
22 uals as the Secretary considers appropriate, shall
23 collaborate with organizations that represent vet-
24 erans to provide educational opportunities for vet-
25 erans to learn how to conduct peer wellness checks.

1 (2) TRAINING MATTERS.—As part of the edu-
2 cational opportunities provided under paragraph (1),
3 the Secretary shall provide the following:

4 (A) A script for veterans to use to conduct
5 peer wellness checks that includes information
6 on appropriate referrals to resources veterans
7 might need.

8 (B) Online and in-person training, as ap-
9 propriate, on how to conduct a peer wellness
10 check.

11 (C) Opportunities for members of organi-
12 zations that represent veterans to learn how to
13 train individuals to conduct peer wellness
14 checks.

15 (D) Training for veterans participating in
16 Battle Buddy Check Week on how to transfer
17 a phone call directly to the Veterans Crisis
18 Line.

19 (E) Resiliency training for veterans partici-
20 pating in Battle Buddy Check Week on han-
21 dling a veteran in crisis.

22 (3) ONLINE MATERIALS.—All training materials
23 provided under the educational opportunities under
24 paragraph (1) shall be made available on a website
25 of the Department.

1 (c) OUTREACH.—The Secretary, in collaboration with
2 organizations that represent veterans, may conduct out-
3 reach regarding educational opportunities under sub-
4 section (b) at—

5 (1) public events where many veterans are ex-
6 pected to congregate;

7 (2) meetings of organizations that represent
8 veterans;

9 (3) facilities of the Department of Veterans Af-
10 fairs; and

11 (4) such other locations as the Secretary, in col-
12 laboration with organizations that represent vet-
13 erans, considers appropriate.

14 (d) VETERANS CRISIS LINE PLAN.—

15 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall ensure
16 that the Veterans Crisis Line has a plan for han-
17 dling the potential increase of calls that may occur
18 during Battle Buddy Check Week.

19 (2) SUBMITTAL OF PLAN.—The head of the
20 Veterans Crisis Line shall submit to the Secretary a
21 plan for how to handle excess calls during Battle
22 Buddy Check Week, which may include the fol-
23 lowing:

24 (A) Additional hours for staff.

25 (B) The use of a backup call center.

1 (C) Any other plan to ensure that calls
2 from veterans in crisis are being answered in a
3 timely manner by an individual trained at the
4 same level as a Veterans Crisis Line responder.

5 (e) VETERANS CRISIS LINE DEFINED.—In this sec-
6 tion, the term “Veterans Crisis Line” means the toll-free
7 hotline for veterans established under section 1720F(h) of
8 title 38, United States Code.

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