

Amendment improves access to support services for returning vets

Washington, DC —Today, Reps. Steve Israel (D – NY) and Peter King (R-NY) successfully amended the FY13 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to improve the coordination of research, treatment, education, and outreach of mental health, substance use disorders, and traumatic brain injury (TBI) among members of the National Guard, Reserve and their families. Knowing of the unmet need for mental health and support services for our veterans, the Israel-King amendment would support public-private partnerships to ensure these brave men and women get the care they deserve.

Rep. Israel said, “We need to think innovatively to care for a large population of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and are now returning home. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes that we made in Vietnam when the Veterans Administration didn’t have the resources it needed to take care of our veterans. I’m proud that Rep. King and I were able to amend the NDAA to improve mental health treatment and outreach for our returning vets by spurring partnerships between private, non-profit institutions and the Department of Defense.”

Rep King said, “It is imperative that our military receive the best treatment available. I am proud to have worked with Rep. Israel on this amendment which will go a long way to ensure that the support system our returning troops need is accessible to them when they need it the most.”

The bi-partisan Israel-King amendment allows the Secretary of Defense to carry out a pilot program to competitively award grants to community partners that engage in research, treatment, education, and outreach activities for TBI, mental health, and substance abuse disorders among our brave National Guard and Reserve members. For every \$3 that the community partners invest, the government would invest \$1.

According to a Pentagon report, mental health issues are the top reason for hospital visits by men in the Armed Forces and the second reason among women. And tragically, an American veteran commits suicide every 80 minutes. Suicide is often linked to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, often seen as the final consequence of not diagnosing and treating PTSD properly. Though the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have relied heavily on members of the National Guard and Reserve, they often return home to communities without the same resources available to those located near major military installations.

The NDAA passed in the House by a vote of 299-120. The bill will now be brought to the Senate for its consideration.

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