

COUNTY OF NEVADA
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April 25, 2023

Honorable Senate Bob J. Archuleta
1021 O Street, Suite 6620
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 783 (Archuleta) As Amended: Veteran Suicide – SUPPORT

Dear Honorable Senator Archuleta:

On behalf of the County of Nevada Board of Supervisors, I am writing you to express our strong supports for Senate Bill 783 (Archuleta), that authorizes both Los Angeles County and Nevada County to create a veteran suicide prevention training pilot program to offer individuals of each county specialized training and certification in suicide prevention with military-connected populations. Specifically, the counties would collaborate and hire a suicide prevention subject matter expert (SME) in the implementation and dissemination of evidence-based practices and evidence-informed interventions with military-connected populations to develop a veteran-focused suicide prevention/intervention training program to the benefit of each County Veterans Services Office and their surrounding veteran communities.

SB 783 provides the necessary framework to address the complexity of suicide prevention efforts in military-connected populations that requires a multifaceted approach. Increased awareness of observable suicide risk factors is one critical part of a successful suicide prevention program because veterans are less likely to disclose suicidal thoughts and intent due to stigma. Safety planning and means-safety interventions are clinical skills, the basics of which can be learned by paraprofessionals and peers who have long been integrated into gatekeeping pieces of training (e.g., ASIST teaches suicide first aid to caregivers; Chaplains-CARE teaches suicide intervention knowledge and skills to Navy chaplains). Equipping non-clinicians working with veterans with these two skill sets is critical since they are more likely to encounter at-risk individuals before a behavioral health professional can intervene. California County Veteran Services Officers and staff will be able to use these skills to reduce immediate risks and connect veterans with appropriate care. Corrective action is needed, and SB 783 is a move in the right direction.

Many service members and veterans with combat or other military-related behavioral health problems do not receive appropriate treatment. Of an estimated 20% of service members with any diagnosed behavioral health problem, nearly half are not receiving any treatment. Failing to appropriately treat existing behavioral health problems can exacerbate other functional problems, cause additional life and family issues, and can lead to suicidal ideation. One veteran's life lost to suicide is one too many.

Therefore, we support a proactive approach to support our veteran community and urge members of the California Legislature to pass SB 783 to create a veteran suicide prevention training pilot program in Nevada County. SB 783 will help ensure that veterans experiencing a mental health crisis are able to receive the appropriate support and guidance from the Veterans Services Office in our county and beyond.

Sincerely,

Susan Hoek, Chair
Board of Supervisors

CC: Honorable Senator Brian Dahle
Honorable Assembly Member Megan Dahle
Keith Boylan, California Department of Veterans Affairs
Scott Holwell, Legislative Chair California Association of County Veterans Services Officers
Karen Lange, Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange