



Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance

August 24, 2020

The Honorable Mark Takano  
Chairman  
House Veterans' Affairs Committee  
B234 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Phil Roe  
Ranking Member  
House Veterans' Affairs Committee  
3460 O'Neill House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe:

On behalf of our nation's veterans and active military service members and their families, the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) offers our support for S. 785, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019. Directing the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense to establish a clinical practice guideline for the treatment of serious mental illness, including bipolar disorder (I & II), schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, and schizoaffective disorder is more important than ever as the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a tremendous toll on American's mental health.

The legislation also is of significant importance in supporting a valuable component of the Veterans PEER Act, which was included in the MISSION Act, by directing the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the OIG to assess capacity of female peer specialists at the VA and directs the Secretary and the OIG to implement a staffing improvement plan for female peer specialists. Additionally, this legislation mandates reporting to Congress on the geographical distribution of female peer specialists, the distribution of women veterans across the U.S., the number of female peer specialists who specialize in mental health/suicide prevention and those who specialize in non-mental health related matters.

As the leading peer-focused mental health organization whose mission is to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders (depression and bipolar disorder), DBSA is nationally recognized for our peer specialist training, our mental health advocacy work, our expansive peer support network, and as an expert on the subject of mood disorders. Our strong support of the veteran community is demonstrated in our leadership to provide our veteran peer specialist training to VA employed peer apprentices and advocating for the PEER Act, which now enables veteran peer specialists to be employed at VA medical facilities in addition to the behavioral health facilities.

We strongly support initiatives contained in the legislation that empower partnership with community-based organizations. In addition to training veterans outside of direct VA employment, we have recognized first-hand the value of training veterans to serve as peer specialists who volunteer or work with veteran service organizations in their communities. In addition, the DBSA network of 500+ local support group meetings include veteran specific groups. These partnerships increase access to much needed peer support and will contribute to improved quality of life and support the goal of zero veteran deaths by suicide.

DBSA is grateful for your leadership and commitment to improving the mental health of our nation's veterans, active military members and their families. Untreated or unsuccessfully treated depression and bipolar disorder account for most of our nation's deaths by suicide. This important legislation will provide needed and appropriate resources. We encourage the House of Representatives to pass S. 785 as quickly as possible to improve the lives of veterans and their families.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Pollock". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being more prominent than the last name "Pollock".

Michael Pollock  
Chief Executive Officer  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

cc: Chairman Jerry Moran, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee  
Ranking Member Jon Tester, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee