

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 17, 2011

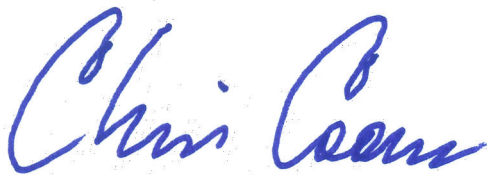
The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

We write to express our extreme concern about the suicide rate among veterans enrolled within the Department of Veterans Affairs, a concern we know that you share. Media sources report a rate of eighteen veteran suicides per day, with around 1,000 additional attempted suicides every month. We are sure you share our opinion that this rate is unacceptable.

In his testimony before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Deputy Secretary Gould answered a question from the Chair on behalf of the Department about the recent Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in May that ordered you to work with the courts to revamp the mental health care. While Deputy Secretary Gould contested statistical points cited in the ruling related to the Department's overall capacity, he conceded "there are things the VA can do better, especially in terms of reaching veterans in rural areas."

We are confident the Department will make wise decisions about its mental health system going forward as you work tirelessly on lowering the veteran suicide rate. We believe the only measure of success on this issue will be a substantial reduction in the rate of veteran suicides and ask that you provide us with your plan to address this grave concern. We ask that you review the current suicide prevention programs and let us know what adjustments are needed to make such programs more effective. We look forward to your recommendations to achieve this result.



Sincerely,

