



August 20, 2020

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Phil Roe
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe:

On behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), I am writing to urge your Committee to move expeditiously to pass S. 785, "The Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act." As the nation's largest organization representing people living with mental illness and their families, NAMI strongly supports this effort to make improvements in mental health care in the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA).

As you know, the Senate unanimously passed S 785 on August 5, 2020. This bipartisan legislation represents the most comprehensive approach to modernizing mental health treatment and supportive services in decades. The legislation includes a range of studies, pilot programs and efforts to develop best practice guidelines focused on improving the performance of the VA in addressing suicide and suicide prevention. We know that the rates of suicide attempts and completions among veterans remains alarmingly high. This is occurring despite enormous investments of funding for mental health care in the VA over the past decade. The VA needs to assess best practices and undertake oversight to ensure that the Department invests in what works.

The legislation also includes a critical initiative on Precision Medicine in the VA to identify and validate relevant biomarkers. This is an important step toward improving treatment and outcomes in the VA and has the potential to transform psychiatric treatment. Finally, S. 785 includes long overdue upgrades to the mental health workforce in the VA.

NAMI urges the House Committee on Veterans Affairs to seize this opportunity and advance S. 785 to the full House in September. Now is the time to modernize mental health care delivered to our veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel H. Gillison, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "D".

Daniel H. Gillison, Jr.
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Speaker Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
Chairman Jerry Moran
Ranking Member John Tester