

January 21, 2020

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
United States Senate
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

Re: Senate Bill No. 3020 Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act

Dear Senator Baldwin:

The county of _____, California would like to express our support for SB 3020, which seeks to award grants to states to promote health and wellness, prevent suicide, and improve outreach to veterans. The VA will award competitive grants to states to create, expand, or support programs that promote health and wellness, prevent suicide and reach veterans who need help navigating the often-burdensome VA process.

The number of veteran suicides nationwide continues to rise, and approximately 14 of the 20 veterans who die by suicide each day are not under the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care. "In 2017 alone, more than 6,100 veterans died by suicide, an amount nearly equal to the number of servicemembers killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. This national public health crisis requires a national approach that meets veterans where they're located.

CVSOs are local county employees who are nationally accredited by the VA to prepare and file VA claims. However, there is currently no federal funding directly available for CVSOs.

The CVSO's are responsible for connecting veterans to their federal benefits, which they earned by virtue of the military service. Many veterans are eligible for veterans benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Once a veteran qualifies, the monetary benefits are paid directly to the veteran on a monthly basis and/or sometimes in a retroactive lump sum.

There is a large number of veterans who are not aware that they are eligible for these federal benefits, and CVSOs are often the first to inform them about their eligibility. Many of these veterans are living on fixed incomes and may be relying on state and local programs to stay afloat. It is important that we find these veterans and get them their benefits, which are difficult to apply for.

Outreach can be difficult. CVSOs are the bridge to finding the correct benefits for qualified veterans. They link veterans to the appropriate programs within the community and can reduce the stress on veterans by dealing with the DVA directly. By increasing the number of CVSOs, states will be better able to leverage their local and federal resources to serve our veterans.

Sincerely,

CC The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
The Honorable Kamala Harris