



*News From The ...*

## **COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

Jeff Miller, Chairman, 335 Cannon House Office Building, Washington D.C. 20515

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**CONTACT: Amy Mitchell (202) 225-3527**

### **Faith-Based and Community Resources First Line of Defense for Returning Veterans**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**—Today, the Subcommittee on Health held a hearing to examine the partnerships, or lack thereof, between VA and faith-based and community organizations entitled, “Building Bridges Between VA and Community Organizations to Support Veterans and Families.” The hearing focused on the need for greater community support of returning veterans, especially OIF/OEF veterans seeking mental health care who often opt for non-VA programs.

“While the primary responsibility for caring for our veterans should and does lie with VA, faith-based and community groups are playing an increasingly key role in supporting the varied needs of our servicemembers, veterans, and their families,” stated Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle, Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Health. “Members of the clergy in particular are often the first point of contact with a veteran grappling with both the visible and invisible wounds of war. Data from the VA National Chaplain Center indicates that four out of ten individuals with mental health challenges seek clergy assistance, more than all other mental health providers combined.”

Buerkle held a [Veterans Mental Health Symposium](#) for faith-based providers last December in Syracuse, New York, and found that many of the faith-based and community resources had not been contacted by VA to help returning veterans transition to civilian life. “It is a shame, most of all for our veterans, that there is a lack of communication, collaboration, and coordination between VA and critical community resources,” Buerkle said.

“Veterans and the ways they are served has changed significantly over the last decade, resulting in the need for changes in the way our country, in turn, serves them. The veterans of today tend to be more geographically dispersed and more mobile than previous generations,” stated Andrew Davis, an Army veteran and founder of the community organization, Saratoga County Veterans Resource Initiative (New York). “There is not a one-size fits all support system that can be created nationwide. We must garner community support and use community resources to serve our Veterans and their families completely.”

A greater focus on local initiatives and resources is what the Subcommittee hopes to bring to the attention of VA officials as well as veterans seeking help.

“We already know that these groups can be effective in supporting the day-to-day needs of the veteran population,” stated Buerkle. “Where partnerships exist, they need to be strengthened. Where they don’t, they need to be fostered. For a veteran or loved one in need, every door should be an open door.”

***Retweatables:***

***#Vets should have access to a range of resources & programs in their communities:***

***<http://veterans.house.gov/press-release/faith-based-and-community-resources-first-line-of-defense-for-returning-veterans>***

***#Faith-based and community resources often first line of defense for returning #vets:***  
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