

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
PROUDLY SERVING AMERICA'S VETERANS



H.R. 918: The Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Health Care Act

Background:

The stresses of military combat may contribute to behaviors or mental conditions which could result in a veteran being discharged from their military service under “other-than-honorable” conditions. An estimated 22,000 veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Military Sexual Trauma, and other mental stress have received other-than-honorable discharges since 2009. Under current law, these veterans may not be eligible to receive federal benefits, including mental health care.

The Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Health Care Act, introduced by Rep. Mike Coffman, would require VA to provide an initial mental health assessment and any subsequent mental health services required to meet urgent mental health care needs to former servicemembers who would otherwise be ineligible for such services because they were discharged from military service under other-than-honorable conditions. The former servicemember would be eligible for such services if they have applied for a character of service determination, participated in military combat or were the victim of military sexual assault.

H.R. 918 would also require VA to carry out a study on the effect of combat on suicide rates and serious mental health issues among veterans.

VA’s [2016 report on veteran suicide](#) found that 20 veterans take their lives every single day. The report also uncovered decreased rates of suicide for veterans receiving health care from VA.

The Message:

- The stresses of military combat may contribute to behaviors or mental conditions, which could lead to an other-than-honorable discharge.
- Veterans receiving health care from VA have a lower rate of suicide.
- We have a duty to care for veterans who may experience mental illness as a result of their service.
- This bipartisan legislation would enable veterans with other-than-honorable discharges to receive critical mental health care from VA.

- This bill also requires VA to put more resources into studying the mental health effects of combat on our nation's heroes.