

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 4, 2020

The Honorable Robert L. Wilkie
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

We write to ask you to consider measures to increase access to Readjustment Counseling Services for veterans, servicemembers, and their families in Minnesota.

We have heard concerns from constituents that the current level of available mental health counseling services is insufficient, particularly for those in rural areas. According to data from the Minnesota Department of Public Health, the veteran suicide rate in Minnesota continues to increase, and Minnesota veterans have died by suicide at more than twice the rate of the civilian population since 2005.¹ The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs' 2017 "Minnesota Veterans Behavioral Health Needs Assessment" identified a shortage of mental and behavioral health providers for Minnesota veterans and made several recommendations, including expanding access to mental health services for veterans in rural areas.²

It is critical that the Department address the shortage of behavioral health providers and expand access to these services for our veterans. For over forty years, Readjustment Counseling Services have helped veterans, servicemembers, National Guard and Reserve military personnel, and their families transition to both military and civilian life through a wide range of resources, including providing health services in addition to assistance with benefits and employment counseling. These resources are crucial to helping our servicemembers and veterans adjust to life during and after military service. We must ensure that our veterans are informed of these services and are able to access them easily to obtain the care that they need and deserve.

It is for this reason that we respectfully request that you work with local veteran partners to increase access to Readjustment Counseling Services in Minnesota. We also ask that you provide us with information regarding the Department's efforts to promote access to these services.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator

¹ Hargarten, Jeff. (2019, November 11). *As Minnesota's veteran population shrinks, suicide still takes a steady toll*. Star Tribune. Retrieved from <http://www.startribune.com/minnesota-s-veteran-suicides-continue-taking-a-steady-toll/506439381/>.

² Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs. (2017, January). *Minnesota Veterans Behavioral Health Needs Assessment*. Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.wilder.org/wilder-research/research-library/minnesota-veterans-behavioral-health-needs-assessment>.