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June 12, 2014

The Honorable Mark Begich
111 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Begich:

I write on behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the medical specialty association representing over 35,000 psychiatric physicians and their patients, in strong support of S. 2425, the Ensuring Veterans' Resiliency Act. This legislation constitutes a great step towards improving access to quality mental health care for our nation's veterans.

As you know, veterans face significant mental health challenges. Roughly 40% of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Substance use, anxiety, and depression are widely experienced by veterans of all ages. Approximately 6,000 veterans commit suicide each year – an average of 16 each day. These brave men and women deserve much better, and your legislation would improve their access to the psychiatric care they require.

The demonstrated shortage of psychiatrists is a contributing factor of the inability of the VHA to deliver mental health services in a timely fashion. The Office of the Inspector General notes that hiring and retaining psychiatrists is the VHA's greatest challenge. Given that the acute mental health needs of our veterans will persist for years to come, it is critical that we address this shortage. Using funds that have already been appropriated, we are confident that the pilot project created by this legislation will greatly assist in encouraging psychiatric physicians to dedicate their careers to serving our veterans.

APA commends you for your leadership on this issue and your commitment to ensuring the resiliency of all of our nation's veterans. We look forward to working with you to advance this legislation forward in Congress.

Sincerely,



Saul M. Levin, M.D., M.P.A.
C.E.O. and Medical Director

