

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Legislative Hearing

December 10, 2025

from

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association Services, Inc.
Centerstone
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
Sandy Hook Promise
The Trevor Project

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

The coalition above of national organizations dedicated to behavioral health submit the following statement for the record in advance of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee legislative hearing being held on December 10, 2025.

We collectively affirm our strong support of the Saving Our Veterans Lives Act of 2025 (S.926) and commend the bipartisan leadership of its sponsors, Senator King and Senator Sheehy. The large and diverse list of stakeholders supporting this practical legislation underscores its effective approach to preventing suicide and empowering our veterans to store their firearms in a secure manner. This bill is urgently needed, as an average of 17.6 veterans die by suicide on a daily basis.ⁱ

Research shows that firearms are used in most suicide deaths because of their high lethality.ⁱⁱ In fact, firearms were used in 72% of suicides among veterans in 2021.ⁱⁱⁱ However, research also demonstrates that the high-risk, acute phase of suicidal crises is often fleeting. Therefore, putting time and distance between a person in crisis and their chosen method for suicide, such as by temporarily removing ready access to a firearm, has been shown to prevent suicide.^{iv} Thus, the voluntary secure storage of firearms, particularly in lockboxes, is of utmost importance in helping individuals in crisis avoid tragic decisions.

We commend the legislation's support of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) efforts to ensure our veterans have access to these life-saving apparatuses. This legislation will build upon important work already underway by the VA to provide secure firearm storage devices to veterans, helping to prevent suicide among veterans and their family members.

Importantly, research also demonstrates that if an individual's preferred, highly lethal method is unavailable, most people in a suicidal crisis do not simply find another way to die by suicide. Moreover, 90% of suicides attempted with a firearm are fatal^v, making it rare that individuals attempting suicide with a firearm will get a second chance to reconsider their decision, even as suicidal crises often represent a conflicting wish to live or die.^{vi} Furthermore, two-thirds of those who survive a suicide attempt will never try again.^{vii} These statistics emphasize the critical need for Congress to ensure that veterans experiencing thoughts of suicide have the capability and means to employ secure firearms storage strategies.

Thank you again for your focus on preventing suicide amongst our nation's veterans. We stand ready to work with the Committee to address this epidemic and save veterans' lives.

For more information, contact K. Conwell Smith, APA Deputy Chief for Military and Veteran Policy at csmith@apa.org or (301) 875-8923 | Bill White, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention at wwhite@afsp.org or (202)740-5967.

ⁱ U.S. Veterans Administration (2024). 2024 National Veterans Suicide Prevention Annual Report. https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2024/2024-Annual-Report-Part-2-of-2_508.pdf

ⁱⁱ CDC. (n.d.). Suicide data and statistics. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. (2023, November). 2023 national veteran suicide prevention annual report. <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2023/2023-NationalVeteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-FINAL-508.pdf>

^{iv} Lubin G, Werbeloff N, Halperin D, Shmushkevitch M, Weiser M, Knobler HY. Decrease in suicide rates after a change of policy reducing access to firearms in adolescents: a naturalistic epidemiological study. *Suicide Life Threat Behav* 2010;40(5):421–4.

^v Conner, A., Azrael, D., & Miller, M. (2019, December 17). Suicide case fatality rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014: A nationwide population-based study. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 885–895. doi:10.7326/M19-1324

^{vi} Bryan, C. J., Rudd, M. D., Peterson, A. L., Young-McCaughan, S., & Wertemberger, E. G. (2016). The ebb and flow of the wish to live and the wish to die among suicidal military personnel. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 202, 58–66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2016.05.049>

^{vii} Owens, D., Horrocks, J., & House, A. (2002). Fatal and non-fatal repetition of self-harm: Systematic review. 181, 193–199.