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**Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Senate Concurrent Resolution 9 — Sponsor Testimony
January 24, 2024**

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on Senate Concurrent Resolution 9.

This resolution urges Congress to support prompt and comprehensive mental health treatment for our nation's active duty military personnel and veterans who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or another service related stress disorder. This is an issue that was brought to my attention by one of my constituents, who is a veteran.

According to the National Institutes of Health, it is common for returning troops facing mental health problems to be affected by one or more of the following disorders: depression, PTSD, substance use disorder, anxiety disorder, and serious mental illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Additionally, according to the United Service Organizations, Inc., (USO) suicide rates among active-duty military members in 2021 were at all-time high since September 11, 2001--4 times higher than military operations--and have steadily increased the past five years. In 2021, the Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report cited the rate of suicide deaths was 36.18 per 100,000 Army soldiers. According to the Journal of the America Medical Association, this is the highest rate since 1938.

Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs states that 30,177 active duty military personnel and veterans who have served in the military after the terror attacks on September 11, 2001 have died by suicide in comparison to the 7,057 service members tragically killed in combat during that same time period.

The United States Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) has taken the initiative to address this ongoing crisis by establishing the National Center for PTSD and mandating that each medical center within the Department has PTSD specialists who provide treatment for veterans.

Additionally, the resolution before you today asks the federal government to go above and beyond its current practices by using only qualified and licensed medical professionals with experience treating military personnel and veterans--instead of college interns as we have heard--to have the authority to approve or disapprove mental health treatment for those experiencing a service-related stress disorder.

The resolution also encourages the Department of Defense to appropriately consider PTSD and other traumatic brain injuries before separating a service member from the military for misconduct. In addition, the resolution asks the VA to consider a person who served in active military and was discharged with any condition except dishonorable for possible qualification of VA health care benefits.

When it comes to our nation's military personnel and veterans, we should expect complete and full medical care for those men and women who sacrificed their health and wellbeing for their country.

Thank you once again Chairman Johnson and members of the committee for the opportunity to present this legislation to you today. I will be glad to answer any questions at this time.