



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

Ohio

April 23, 2024

The Honorable Senator Terry Johnson, Chair
Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Senate Building, One Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: Support S.B. 225; Designate Veterans Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day

Dear Chairman Johnson and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of SB 225 to designate September 22 as Veterans Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day. My name is Ashley Wilson, and I am Area Director for the Ohio Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). I work closely with our volunteer-led chapter in our work to save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide -- through research, education, advocacy, and support.

Suicide is a leading, preventable public health problem in our state. In Ohio in 2021, suicide was the 3rd leading cause of death for youth and young adults ages 10-24, the 2nd leading cause for adults ages 25-34, the 5th leading cause for adults ages 35-44, and the 13th leading cause of death overall; that same year we lost 1,766 Ohioans to suicide. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 242 Ohio Veterans died by suicide in 2021, accounting for 14% of total suicides in Ohio that year. The rate of suicide for Ohio Veterans in 2021 (per 100,000 population) was 33.9, as compared to a rate of 18.6 for Ohio's population overall.

Veterans and Service Members are at a greater risk of suicide than their civilian peers. SB 225, which would designate September 22nd as Veterans Suicide Awareness and prevention Day, will help to raise awareness in how suicide affects Veterans. This is just the first step in the process of preventing Veteran and Servicemember suicide.

There is no single cause of Veteran suicide, but by treating and preventing mental health and substance use conditions, limiting access to lethal means, and empowering Veterans to live and thrive in their communities, we can save lives. We should be doing everything we can to lift up our Veterans and support a culture where it is a sign of strength to seek help, for themselves and their peers. Research tells us that suicide is preventable. We have an opportunity to save lives and reduce the rate of suicide here in Ohio.

Committee members, the AFSP Ohio Chapter is grateful for your consideration of SB 225 and for working with your colleagues and other agencies to address the suicide rate among our Veteran population. With your support, passage of this legislation will affirm the state's commitment to improving the lives of Ohio Veterans and their loved ones to prevent the tragic loss of life to suicide in the future. Please feel free to contact the Chapter at awilson@afsp.org with any questions or if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Ashley Wilson

Ashley Wilson
Area Director
AFSP Ohio