

March 8, 2021

Members of the House Labor, Industry, Veterans and Military Affairs Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, we are writing in support of HF 1526. The Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention at the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs reports that veterans in the U.S. are some of the most vulnerable in our population to suicide. The number of deaths by suicide has been steadily rising in the U.S. for almost two decades, and veterans are disproportionately represented in those numbers, even as the total number of veterans in our population is decreasing over time. We also know that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased rates of anxiety and depression throughout our entire population.

At NAMI, our mission is fundamentally one of hope, and we are happy to support HF 1526 as one important way to spread hope, particularly in these difficult times. While the statistics above are difficult to see, we know that there is hope for the veterans and families impacted by mental illnesses. The 2020 report of National Veteran Suicide Prevention by the VA also showed signs that suicide deaths have slowed in recent years, particularly for veterans engaged in treatment. This is a great illustration of why HF 1526 is so important, because we know that there are real and effective ways to prevent suicides.

Promoting prevention along with awareness, and equipping veterans and their families with knowledge and tools will go a long way in stemming the tide of suicide in our communities. We're grateful that the legislature is taking time to address this issue and promote hope for Veterans in Minnesota with mental illnesses.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

Elliot Butay
Criminal Justice Coordinator