

## National Commander Troiola to Congress: Apply 'Pact Act' to stop suicides.

You can view the testimony at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E46JVBETCdc>

By [John Raughter](#)

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Calling for Congress to apply the same urgency toward stopping veteran suicide as it did toward passage of the PACT Act last year, National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola laid out [The American Legion's legislative priorities](#) before a joint session of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees Wednesday morning.

After [praising Congress for passing the landmark legislation](#) which opened benefits to millions of veterans exposed to environmental toxins, CMD Troiola reminded lawmakers about the words associated with the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act.

"'Pact,' 'promise' and 'honor' are terms we must also urgently apply to the epidemic of veteran suicide," Troiola said. "The American Legion's 'Be the One' initiative, which raises awareness nationally about the problem and seeks to destigmatize asking for help, is our organization's highest priority today. To us, suicide prevention is a pact we share with our friends and comrades of military service, a promise from each of us in The American Legion to 'Be the One' to save at least one other veteran from suicide."

Sen. Maggie Hassan, D-N.H., praised The American Legion for its work in stopping suicides. "Peer support programs encourage veterans to reach out and connect with one another proactively, which improves veterans' mental health and reduce the risk of suicide," she said. "The American Legion recognized the importance of these programs when it created the Buddy Check program in 2019."

Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, called on the Department of Defense to take a greater role in preventing suicide among transitioning veterans. "The Pentagon should put as much time, money and effort into the transition out as they do in the recruiting in...the data shows us that the first two or three years after separation are the danger period."

Another priority that The American Legion has long advocated is the elimination of the disabled veterans tax, also known as concurrent receipt. Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont, promised to reintroduce the Major Richard Star Act, which would eliminate the tax for more than 50,000 military retirees with combat-related injuries. Tester was also praised by King for his leadership in passing the PACT Act.

"The PACT Act would not have passed without Jon Tester," King said of Tester, who serves as the chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Exorbitant legal fees charged in connection with the Camp LeJeune Justice Act drew a strong response from Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, who sponsored Legion-supported legislation to cap what lawyers can charge.

"You've got the trial lawyers of America who are working to rip off the veterans and families of sick Marines," Sullivan said. "My bill is a choice between taking care of sick Marines and their families or enriching trial lawyers." Sullivan called advertising by predatory law firms "disgusting."

During his opening statement, CMD Troiola pointed out that The American Legion provides assistance for such claims “free of charge.”

Women’s healthcare was also addressed at the hearing. “We do believe VA is moving forward, however more needs to be done,” said Autrey James, chairman of The American Legion Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission. “There are barriers to gender-specific high-quality care (to) include not being identified as a veteran, not being recognized as a veteran by VA employees, lack of awareness and understanding of VA healthcare benefits and the perceptions that VA is an all-male healthcare system. We have to address that and the way to address that is through training. We have to make sure that VA is properly training those who come in contact with our women veterans to ensure that they are being treated with the same care and dignity as any other veteran who enters the system.”

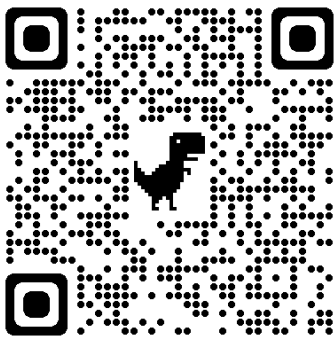
Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill., welcomed The American Legion’s large presence in the Capitol. “The men and women of The American Legion are the greatest advocates here in D.C. and across the country. You know better than anyone else that the veterans’ community has earned a system that works for them.”

The TAL Department of Arizona Legislative Team was in Washington, DC attending the Washington Conferences and visiting our Congressional Leadership advocating for the America Legion Legislative priorities. The following subjects are included in the testimony:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHjBq6qzEMU>

You can make a difference by signing up for the Grass Roots Action Center on the National Webpage:

<https://www.voterve.net/AmericanLegion/home>



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