

SENATE MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION No. 62

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 12, 2023

The Senate Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee reports favorably Senate Joint Resolution No. 62.

This joint resolution designates September 22nd of each year as "Veterans Suicide Awareness & Remembrance Day" in New Jersey. By having an annual observance, we elevate the public health challenge of the increased suicide rates of veterans and active duty military personnel into the public consciousness and raise our continued awareness to this challenge. This continued awareness facilitates discussion about Veteran/Military suicide, thereby taking away the societal stigma associated with mental health treatment. By normalizing the subject of mental health among Veterans and Active Military, we will allow them to receive necessary treatment without fear of judgment while simultaneously showing that we care as a State and nation, about preventing living Veterans and Active Military from dying by suicide. The joint resolution calls on the Governor to annually issue a proclamation calling on the people of this State to mark this day with appropriate activities and programs.

Individuals who have served in the United States military made significant sacrifices to defend the United States and its people. Members of the military are often deployed to remote locations far from family and friends and may not have regular contact with their loved ones. During their deployments these individuals can miss important milestones including the birth of a child, family birthdays, or the funeral of a loved one. Members of the military engaged in combat operations face added stresses including situations where they may witness the death of their fellow service members and living in constant fear of their own injury or death. These stress factors contribute to a sharp increase in the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress among service members and United States military and veterans. Since 2010 more than 65,000 veterans and active military have died by suicide, more than the total number of American combat deaths from the Vietnam War and the post-9/11 conflicts combined. The New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, the federal Department of Veterans Affairs, and various nonprofit entities provide resources to veterans and active

military who are at risk of suicide including telephone hotlines and mental health workshops. Increasing public awareness about the increased risk of suicide amongst veterans and military can help inform veterans, their families, and the public about the resources available to these veterans and military and help eliminate the stigma associated with mental health treatments. Designating September 22nd of each year as “Veterans Suicide Awareness & Remembrance Day” will raise our continued awareness to this critical threat to the health and safety of individuals who have sacrificed so much for their fellow Americans in service of our beloved country. This annual observance originated with Kevin W. Hertell, a U.S. Air Force Veteran who lost his cousin to suicide in 2016, Senior Airman Robert McRae Dean, U.S. Air Force. Mr. Hertell established this observance to recognize and forever remember the life and death of Senior Airman Robert McRae Dean and all other Veterans and Active Military members who have died by suicide.