

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

LD 542: An Act To Provide Support Services for Military Members Transitioning to Civilian Life in Maine

Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

Monday, March 8th 2021

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of *An Act to Provide Support Services for Military Members Transitioning to Civilian Life in Maine*. Maine has a proud history of Military Service; currently representing the 3rd highest percentage of residents of the state serving in the Military. Military operations around the globe have continued for the last two decades, and so has the number of Mainers who are willing to serve our nation. As such, more attention and understanding of the impact of military service on the mental wellness of veterans and how it impacts their transition back to civilian life is needed.

Only about 3.5% of the general population meets the criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI), but it is estimated that approximately 20% of veterans will meet the criteria. Due to the complexities of military service, transitioning into civilian life can be particularly difficult. Symptoms of underlying mental health conditions are often exacerbated during these times of increased stress. Recent research has shown that separate from symptoms of PTSI, approximately one third to half of all veterans will experience symptoms of anxiety and stress during the time of transition from military to civilian life. Furthermore, 42% of veterans experiencing symptoms of anxiety and stress will utilize alcohol or other substances during this time period to cope with the symptoms that they are experiencing. These symptoms of stress often impact not only one's perceptions of the world, but also drastically impact the way in which an individual interacts with the community around them. These symptoms can lead to difficulties with veteran's relationships, such as family and friends, difficulties within work environments, and difficulties with the law. A veteran's struggle with mental health issues can also lead to suicide. Currently, Maine leads all other New England states in the number of veterans lost to suicide.

NAMI Maine understands that the State of Maine is in difficult fiscal position during these times. However we urge the committee to pass LD 542 in order to ensure that returning veterans and their families are provided with the supports and services necessary to navigate what can be a difficult and stressful time. Currently, only 1% of the nation's population is serving during a time of the nation's longest military conflicts. The stress on this small percentage of the population is also further impacted by the complications that have arisen due to the on-going pandemic. Therefore we see prioritizing those who have chosen to serve and defend others of the utmost importance.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: *Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.*

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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