

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 18, 2019

Office of Governor Ron DeSantis  
State of Florida  
The Capitol  
400 S. Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis,

We write to request your help in obtaining a true and accurate count of the annual number of veteran suicides in Florida. As Members of Congress from Florida's 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Congressional Districts, we are honored to represent more than 110,000 of the 1,500,000 veterans who call the Sunshine State home. At a joint meeting of our Veterans Advisory Boards, local veteran leaders raised concerns that veterans suicide data may not be as up-to-date or accurate as it could be. We need the most accurate data possible to effectively tackle this epidemic facing our veteran community.

As you know, Congress tasks the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to report annual veterans suicide data, along with general data on mortality and life expectancy. However, because not all veterans use the VA, they also rely on a combination of U.S. Department of Defense service records and state death certificates. Unfortunately, state death certificates do not always tell the full picture. After a death, veteran status is indicated on a form filled out by a funeral home; however, when local medical examiners take over death investigations in cases of suspected suicide, they do not necessarily investigate whether the deceased is a veteran. We are concerned that this dynamic is leading to an undercount of veteran suicides.

As you know, the Governor's office works with the Medical Examiners Commission and District Medical Examiners on best practices and standards. We ask your assistance to improve the accuracy of data on veteran mortality and life expectancy by establishing a policy in which every medical examiner must determine and indicate the deceased's veteran status on the death certificate. For those with missing or incomplete service records, medical examiners and investigators can partner with Veteran Service Organizations to improve the accuracy of the record.

Through our roles on the House Veterans Affairs Committee and the House Appropriations Committee, we are committed to fighting for those who fought for our freedom – and are still fighting today. Ensuring the accuracy of the count of veterans who die from suicide is a small but impactful way the state of Florida can help in this fight. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working together to help Florida's veterans.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Gus M. Bilirakis  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS