



## Missouri House of Representatives

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### **Missouri House Passes HB 1495 to Bolster Veteran Mental Health Support**

**JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.** – In a significant move towards prioritizing the mental health and well-being of Missouri veterans, the Missouri House has third read and passed House Bill 1495. This legislation, which passed with an unanimous bipartisan vote of 157-0, would task the Missouri Veterans Commission with expanding its work to prevent veteran suicide by mandating a comprehensive review of the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 and its associated regulations by the Missouri Veterans Commission.

Under the provisions of HB 1495, the Missouri Veterans Commission, in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health, is tasked with providing recommendations and implementing measures to curb veteran suicide. This encompasses the adoption of procedures, programs, treatment options, additional aid, and any other necessary assistance, subject to appropriation.

The issue of veteran suicide has been one of great importance to Missouri and the United States as a whole. A U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs report revealed that 6,392 veterans nationwide lost their lives to suicide in 2021, marking an increase of more than 100 lives from the previous year. In Missouri, 185 military veterans died by suicide that year, with the 2023 federal report indicating a veteran suicide rate in Missouri significantly surpassing the national average.

“We have a lot more veterans committing suicide than the general public. Our rate of veteran suicides is 45.2 per 100,000, but the national average is 33.9. Missouri’s statistics are significantly higher than the national average,” Rep. Dave Griffith, the bill sponsor, said. “It does not really matter what the number is. I don’t care about how Missouri ranks – we have too many veterans taking their lives. Just one is too many.”

The legislation underscores a proactive approach in addressing the mental health challenges faced by veterans, recognizing the need for tailored and effective support mechanisms. Collaborative efforts between the Missouri Veterans Commission and the Department of Mental Health aim to establish a

comprehensive framework that goes beyond conventional methods to ensure the well-being of those who have served our country.

A key provision of HB 1495 mandates that, on or before July 1, 2025, and every July 1st thereafter, the Missouri Veterans Commission must submit a detailed report to the Department of Public Safety and the General Assembly. This report will encompass recommendations, the implementation of measures, and the overall effectiveness of the Commission's efforts to prevent veteran suicide.

This landmark legislation reflects Missouri's commitment to honoring and supporting its veterans, acknowledging the unique challenges they face in maintaining mental health. By taking proactive steps outlined in HB 1495, the state aims to set a precedent for other regions in addressing the critical issue of veteran suicide. The bipartisan support for the passage of House Bill 1495 underscores the collective dedication to prioritizing the mental health and well-being of Missouri's veterans and ensuring they receive the necessary resources and support for fulfilling lives beyond their military service.

"I am deeply committed to the well-being of our veterans who have selflessly served our nation. The passage of this bill is not just legislative progress; it's a crucial step in addressing the pressing issue of veteran suicide," House Speaker Dean Plocher, R-Des Peres, said. "By prioritizing comprehensive measures to prevent the tragedy of veteran suicides, we are reaffirming our duty to those who have sacrificed for our freedom. This legislation exemplifies our shared commitment to the mental health and resilience of Missouri's veterans, marking a significant stride towards building a future where no veteran is left behind."

"These types of services are crucial in preventing veteran suicides. If we can prevent one suicide today... we can start turning this into a downward trend," Griffith, R-Jefferson City, said. "Every Missourian can make a difference. We can take that step today."

*Representative Dave Griffith, a Republican, represents Cole County (District 60) in the Missouri House of Representatives. He was elected to his first two-year term in November 2018. For more information, please contact Rep. Griffith's office at 573-751-2412 or via email at [Dave.Griffith@House.Mo.Gov](mailto:Dave.Griffith@House.Mo.Gov).*

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