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# United States Senate

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The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

The Honorable Mark Esper  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20310

Dear Secretary Wilkie and Secretary Esper,

Last week the Senate Armed Service Personnel Subcommittee held a hearing on the unacceptable continued increase in suicides among our active duty service members. Along with current service members we discussed the continuing epidemic of suicide amongst our veterans. While I applaud the VA's efforts which have resulted in a decrease in the overall rate of veteran suicides, I am alarmed at the continuing increase in the number of younger veterans taking their own lives. Recently Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America found that over half of its members knew a post-9/11 veteran who took their own life.

While we must continue to investigate the factors driving these numbers the wrong way, our veterans and service members have identified the transition process as an area of key concern. Veterans who have left service within the past year are 2.5 times more likely to die by suicide than their active duty counterparts, and this rate is even higher among our female veterans. Both our service members and veterans have expressed frustration at the inadequacy of the transition process. A Brown University study found that:

- 68 percent of veterans reported difficulty adjusting;
- 96 percent showed interest in community reintegration programs;
- 65-80 percent did not have a job upon exiting; and
- 65 percent found internet referrals inadequate for finding a job.

Many of our service members join at a young age and spend months in immersive training to prepare them for military service. As hard as this transition to military life is, the transition back to civilian life is proving to be much more difficult for many veterans.

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I ask that the VA work closely with the Department of Defense and build a more comprehensive transition program that provides more internships, reintegration programs, and on-the-job training to help service members and veterans during this especially critical time.

Sincerely,



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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator