

# Finkenauer Introduces Bipartisan Bill to Establish Veterans Caregiver Support Program

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Press Release

WASHINGTON, DC – Congresswoman Abby Finkenauer (IA-01) and Congressman John Curtis (R-UT) on Friday introduced the Peer Support for Veterans Families Act to improve resources for caregivers of veterans with diagnosed mental health issues.

"The folks who support our veterans need more support," **Congresswoman Abby Finkenauer said.** "Caring for someone with a mental health diagnosis can take a toll, putting family members and loved ones at risk for anxiety, depression and other health problems. The Peer Support for Veterans Families Act will help ensure we're providing needed support for our caregivers, just like we see in private healthcare systems. I want to thank Congressman Curtis for working on this important bill that could change lives."

The Peer Support for Veterans Families Act directs the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to set up a pilot program in 10 medical facilities to offer education and peer support programs to veterans' caregivers and families. With the permission of the veteran, caregivers will receive training in understanding mental illness, coping with stress, and de-escalating crisis situations. The new initiative will allow caregivers to learn from and support each other as well as provide them the opportunity to lead trainings and peer support meetings.

The bill directs the VA to choose sites that lack other resources nearby and to contract with training organizations with expertise in evidence-based approaches and military/veteran cultural competence, and that can offer services online whenever possible.

"Our veterans risked their lives to protect the freedoms that we enjoy daily — our top priority should be ensuring these American heroes have the necessary resources to succeed as they transition to civilian life," **Congressman John Curtis (R-UT) said.** "We also must help out the loved ones who supported our veterans throughout their military career, particularly caregivers helping

veterans manage the debilitating effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder resulting from military service. I am proud to support the Peer Support for Veteran Families Act to deliver critical tools so that veteran caregivers will be able to effectively support the needs of their loved ones dealing with these crippling mental health issues."

Congressman David McKinley (R-WV) is an original cosponsor of the Peer Support for Veterans Families Act.

The Peer Support for Veterans Families Act is endorsed by: the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA), the American Mental Health Counselors Association, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, the American Association of Suicidology, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and The American Legion.

### **Support for the Peer Support for Veterans Families Act:**

"The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention applauds Rep. Finkenauer's leadership in supporting the mental health of our nation's Veterans, their family members, and their care givers. Too many Veterans are dying by suicide and too often are their loved ones isolated in moments of hardship and distress. This legislation will improve Veteran mental health care and support veteran families, and we urge Congress to swiftly pass this bill into law."

**— Robert Gebbia, CEO of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**

"The VFW values the key role that a veteran's support system plays in a veteran's health and well-being. The VFW supports Congresswoman Finkenauer and Congressman Curtis's Peer Support for Veteran Families Act. This bill would provide education and peer support programs for family members and caregivers of veterans with mental health disorders. It would also giving priority to organizations with military and veteran culture competence, and programs using technology to reach those living in rural areas."

**— Tammy Barlet, Associate Director of VFW's National Legislative Service**

"After a mental health disorder diagnosis, social support is key for both veterans and their families and caregivers. That's why I strongly support Rep. Finkenauer's bipartisan legislation that establishes a pilot program offering education and peer support at VA facilities for veterans' families after a diagnosis—and during the COVID-19 pandemic, it's even more critical that this support can be provided virtually wherever possible. By promoting connectedness and teaching coping strategies, this bill will take meaningful steps towards preventing veteran suicide."

— **Congressman Mark Takano, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs**