

THE NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD
MILITARY LAW TASK FORCE

March 20, 2024

To the Members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees,
Senate Armed Services Committee
Senator Jack Reed, Chair

House Armed Services Committee
U.S. Representative Jack Bergman

We are writing on behalf of the Military Law Task Force of the National Lawyers Guild, a nation-wide network of attorneys, law students and legal workers (primarily military counselors) working in the areas of military, veterans and selective service law.

Our members have watched with great concern the high numbers of suicides and attempted suicides within the military, and the services' frequently unsuccessful efforts to provide the support and assistance necessary to change this trend. Many of our clients present with suicidal ideation or a history of suicide attempts, and a great many of these have significant difficulty in obtaining help through their commands or the military health care system. Even with legal intervention, these clients as likely as not face discouragement and even harassment from supervisors at all levels.

Given this extremely distressing problem, we write in support of Chris McGhee's open letter urging the Department of Defense to carry out and complete the study of suicides by military occupational specialty or rate, and urging Members of Congress to ensure that this is done. The data produced by such a study will provide significant insights, urgently needed to more appropriately address the problem of military suicides. Without a better understanding of areas of work where "suicide clusters" or simply high rates of suicide and suicide attempts occur, little can be done to identify and address the factors causing this.

Service members in high-stress career fields, in particular, face personal and professional tensions that can lead to suicide in an environment where any admission of mental health problems is perceived as weakness and lack of commitment. In many fields, members also face the problem of moral injury, which has been identified as a strong factor in many suicides. The study required by Section 599 of the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act will assist in better identifying and understanding of the Military Occupational Specialties and career fields where moral injury increases the risk of suicide, allowing an opportunity for health care providers and the military as a whole to address this problem.

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We ask the members of Congress to continue pressing the military to complete the study and release its findings at the earliest possible time.

The lives and well-being of our service members and veterans are of paramount importance to our Task Force, and to other organizations with whom we work. We urge you to recognize the urgency of this matter, and take action accordingly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeff Lake", is positioned above the typed name.

Jeff Lake
Military Law Task Force, Chair
National Lawyers Guild