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June 17, 2015

The Honorable Ashton Carter
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1300 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Carter,

Thank you for your continued efforts to support the health and well-being of our military personnel. You know better than most the toll that combat operations have taken on American service members and I commend you for your continued advocacy on their behalf.

I write today to express my concern with reports that the Department of Defense (DoD) will close its successful Vets4Warriors program and rely instead on the Military OneSource Initiative. DoD's Vets4Warriors program, which is managed by Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care, has served more than 100,000 active-duty military personnel. The program is operated by veterans, who maintain a 24/7 nationwide hotline for service members and their families.

This hotline has proven to be a vital resource, which offers referral services, peer-to-peer support, and outreach assistance to help active-duty personnel cope with and manage the unique stresses of military service. The program has been hailed as an overwhelming success. In 2013, the acting Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Jessica L. Wright, visited Rutgers University and praised the program for its fresh and innovative approach.

Peer-to-peer support fills a crucial gap for personnel who may not be comfortable seeking help from physicians or civilians—who feel as if only other soldiers could understand—and I am concerned about how the sudden and unexpected nature of this closure may impact these men and women.

I respectfully request that the Department of Defense provide justification for why it decided to terminate the Vets4Warriors program, whether it believes the same level of service will be provided elsewhere within the Department, and what considerations were made for those military personnel currently utilizing this innovative support network. While I have no doubt that this decision was made with the best of intentions, I want to be sure there is no gap or reduction in service following the closure.

I look forward to your response and hope that we can work together on this issue and many others that improve the range of services available to active-duty personnel and their families.

Sincerely,



Richard L. Hanna
U.S. REPRESENTATIVE