

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 28, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to bring to your attention Vet2Vet, an innovative New Jersey initiative that has demonstrated extraordinary results in preventing military suicides while providing employment for veterans, and to urge you to consider expanding the Vet2Vet helpline to other military installations in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 budget proposal for the Department of Defense.

As you are well aware, the rates of mental health problems in the military continue to increase. Nearly 20 percent of service members who have returned from Iraq or Afghanistan have reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or major depression. Last week, the Army announced that it had reported 343 suicides of soldiers, Department of the Army civilians, and family members in 2010, compared to 274 in 2009. The Army National Guard reported a doubling in suicides from 2009 to 2010.

While significant resources exist to support our soldiers, veterans, and family members, connections to support services often are not made at the right time. For this reason, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), in collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, developed the Vet2Vet program, which provides comprehensive support for soldiers, veterans and their families. Since Vet2Vet began working with the New Jersey National Guard in 2005, there has not been a single suicide. The Army has already recognized the success of the Vet2Vet helpline and it is being launched at Fort Hood on February 1st as Vets4Warriors.

A critical element of the Vet2Vet program is the anonymous, veteran-operated "helpline" available to serve members and their families. The helpline is answered in-person by veterans who are trained, paid employees and can provide support for a range of problems, from PTSD and serious mental illness to minor marital or financial issues. This anonymous, peer-operated helpline combats the pervasive problem of stigma related to asking for help. From 2005 throughout July 2010, the Vet2Vet helpline assisted more than 3,000 veterans and their family members.

We must continue to explore new ways to combat the growing rise in mental health issues among our nation's brave men and women in uniform. The Vet2Vet helpline has a

demonstrated record of success and I am pleased that Fort Hood has recognized the value in its services. Accordingly, I respectfully urge you to consider expanding the Vet2Vet helpline nationally by including the necessary resources in the FY 2012 Department of Defense budget request.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank R. Lautenberg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "F" and a long, sweeping underline.

cc:

Dr. Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense

General Peter Chiarelli, Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army