

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 4, 2011

First Lady Michelle Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dr. Jill Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mrs. Obama and Dr. Biden:

I applaud your launch of a military family awareness campaign and write 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 their spouses. I invite you to include the Vet2Vet facility in Piscataway, New Jersey on your tour, so you can meet the veterans, service members and their families that make this innovative program so successful.

As a veteran of war, I understand the sacrifices made by the families of our nation's brave men and women in uniform and I commend you both for quickly making the support of military families a high priority. As you are well aware, military families may be forced to adjust to changing homes, worry about loved ones who are deployed or cope with mental health issues, or face the grief of dealing with the loss of a fallen soldier. These unique stressors may cause military families to experience their own mental health issues. According to a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in January 2010, Army wives with husbands who have been deployed to combat zones face significantly higher rates of mental health issues than those whose husbands have not been deployed.

Since the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) and the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs developed the Vet2Vet program for the New Jersey National Guard in 2005, there has not been a single suicide in that group. 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 a veteran or a military family member who is a trained, paid employee and can provide support for a range of problems, from PTSD and serious mental illness to minor marital or financial issues. The Army has already

recognized the success of the Vet2Vet helpline and it was launched at Fort Hood on February 1<sup>st</sup> as Vets4Warriors.

From 2005 to July 2010, the Vet2Vet helpline assisted more than 3,000 veterans and their family members. Almost 20 percent of the calls to the helpline were from family members. The Vet2Vet program recognizes the unique challenges that military families face and provides these families with the necessary tools to cope with these issues, including by employing two military spouses employed to answer the helpline.

As you embark on your tour around the country to launch a military family awareness campaign, I appreciate your consideration of this invitation. I know you will be as impressed with the accomplishments of Vet2Vet as I have been and I would welcome the opportunity to show you this innovative program.

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, looped initial "F".