



Bipartisan Women Senators Introduce the Senate SERVE Act— Increasing Identification of Mental Illness and Eating Disorders Treatment Access for Military Members and Families

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 23, 2019) – Military members and their families have higher prevalence rates of eating disorders than the civilian population, with an estimated 7-8% of servicemembers affected by this serious mental illness. Furthermore, studies show that over 20% of children of servicemembers and 34% of female active duty military members are at risk of eating disorders, and according to a recent study 16% of female veterans meet the diagnostic criteria for an eating disorder. The mental health ramifications of eating disorders are unlike any psychiatric illness, due to a high mortality rate, only second to that of opioid use. This high mortality rate, coupled with complex co-occurring medical conditions and the numerous issues our military members and families face with the ability to access eating disorders treatment, demand the Senate to take action.

The Eating Disorders Coalition applauds Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and veteran Martha McSally (R-AZ) for introducing the *Supporting Eating Disorders Recovery through Vital Expansion (SERVE) Act of 2019* to ensure our nation’s servicemembers and their families have access to comprehensive eating disorders treatment under the TRICARE health insurance program. Senators Shaheen and McSally’s legislation will act as a Senate counterpart to veterans Congressman Seth Moulton (D-MA-06) and Brian Mast’s (R-FL-18) House of Representatives *SERVE Act* (H.R. 2767). The House and Senate bills are also co-sponsored by Senators Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) and Mazie Hirono (D-HI), and Representatives Veronica Escobar (D-TX-16), Ted Deutch (D-FL-22), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA-01), Ted Lieu (D-CA-33), Kathy Castor (D-FL-14), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL-12), Mike Levin (D-CA-49), and Mike Thompson (D-CA-05).

“Eating disorders are serious mental health illnesses that should be treated with the same urgency as any physical illness, and that’s especially true for our servicemembers. Our military members deserve access to the same health benefits as the men and women they’re sworn to protect,” **said Senator Shaheen**. “I’m proud to stand with Senator McSally and this bipartisan group to introduce the *SERVE Act* so we can make common-sense reform to our laws that would further expand TRICARE coverage for eating disorders treatments. This bill will help ensure that our military leaders are trained to identify signs and symptoms of mental health illnesses such as eating disorders to address them earlier. Our military families make great sacrifices on behalf of our nation, a debt we can never fully repay. At the very least, we must ensure they have the health care and assistance they need to live safe, healthy, and happy lives.”

“Over 30 million Americans suffer from an eating disorder with our servicemembers and their families suffering at even higher rates than their civilian counterparts,” **Senator McSally said**. “The *SERVE Act* would ensure that those who fought for us can access necessary recovery treatment under TRICARE and that our commanders and supervisors are equipped to identify the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders.”

Today’s introduction of the bipartisan *SERVE Act* is a monumental step forward in advancing military members and their families’ access to eating disorders treatment and early identification of all mental illnesses. Over 45 national mental health, military, and veterans service organizations have endorsed this legislation including: 2020 Mom, Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work, American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, American Dance Therapy Association, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, American Group Psychotherapy Association, American Psychiatric

Association, American Psychoanalytic Association, American Psychological Association, AMVETS, Anxiety and Depression Association of America, American Art Therapy Association, Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare, Cities Thrive Mental Health Coalition, Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action, EDGE Consulting LLC, First Focus on Children, F.E.A.S.T., Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice, Mental Health America, Military Child Education Coalition, Military Special Needs Network, Military-Veterans Advocacy, NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, National Alliance on Mental Illness, National Association for Behavioral Healthcare, National Association for Children's Behavioral Health, National Association for Rural Mental Health, National Association of Social Workers, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, National Disability Rights Network, National Eating Disorders Association, National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, National Health Care for the Homeless Council, National Military Family Association, New Hampshire Community Behavioral Health Association, New Hampshire Psychiatric Association, Project HEAL, Protect Our Defenders, Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, Residential Eating Disorders Consortium, School-Based Health Alliance, The Kennedy Forum, The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health, and the Treatment Communities of America. If passed, the bill would eliminate age restrictions of military children and spouses to receive treatment, lift restrictions to receive higher levels of care, and will require mental health early identification training to Commanders and Supervisory personnel.

“As a former servicemember and current military spouse with a history of anorexia and bulimia, I have experienced the challenges that the military faces in wanting to understand the complexity of treating this illness with no concept of where to start,” said **Chandler Rand, who served as a Lance Corporal in the United States Marine Corps**. “I am pleased to see that female Senators, including a fellow former combat veteran, are leading the Senate *SERVE Act*. This legislation will help guide our military in supporting the recovery process for active duty personnel and their families wherein eating disorders are highly prevalent.”

Eating disorders affect 30 million Americans during their lifetime and have suicide rates 23x higher than the general population. The disorder does not discriminate, and affects people of all genders, ages, races, sizes, sexual orientations, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. Eating disorders are complex, biologically based illnesses that include the specific disorders of anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder, and other specified feeding or eating disorders as recognized by the American Psychiatric Association's DSM 5. With interventions at the appropriate durations and levels of care, eating disorders can be successfully treated to recovery.

The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is a Washington, DC-based, federal advocacy organization comprised of advocacy organizations, academics, treatment providers, family/loved ones of children with eating disorders and people experiencing eating disorders nationwide. The EDC advances the recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority throughout the United States. Additional resources can also be found at www.eatingdisorderscoalition.org.

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