



## House Armed Services Committee Expands Military Families' Access to Eating Disorders Care

WASHINGTON, D.C. (September 2, 2021) — The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) celebrates the passage of Amendment 840 within the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which includes key provisions of the Supporting Eating Disorders Recovery through Vital Expansion (SERVE) Act ([H.R.1309](#)). The FY22 NDAA now moves to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives for a vote.

The EDC applauds Representatives Seth Moulton (D-MA-06) and Vicky Hartzler (R-MO-04) for their leadership in championing the SERVE Act amendment and Representatives John Katko (R-NY-24) and Veronica Escobar (D-TX-16) for their leadership of H.R. 1309, the authorizing bill. This is a momentous victory for military servicemembers and their families and a testament to the power of collective advocacy by the EDC, its member organizations, and the eating disorders community.

Currently, servicemembers' family members over the age of 20 cannot receive higher levels of care for eating disorders. The SERVE Act provisions included within Amendment 840 of the House NDAA will expand the age limit for military families to receive eating disorders care from 20 years old to the Medicare-eligible age of 64.

“Yesterday was an important first step in making sure that servicemembers and their families who are dealing with eating disorders are given the critical support and quality health care they need,” said **Representative Seth Moulton (D-MA-06)**. “I’m looking forward to working with my colleagues in Congress and organizations like the Eating Disorders Coalition to get this urgent piece of legislation signed into law.”

Research shows that 21% of servicemembers' children and 26% of spouses show symptoms of an eating disorder, rates that are three times higher than that of civilians.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, 34% of female active-duty military members have screened as at-risk for an eating disorder, and 16% of female veterans are affected by an eating disorder today.<sup>2</sup> Body dysmorphic disorder, characterized by obsessive thinking about a flaw that is usually imagined or hardly noticeable to others and muscular dysmorphia, marked by a negative body image and obsessive desire to have a muscular physique, affects 13% of male servicemembers.<sup>3</sup> The strong link between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), military sexual trauma, and eating disorders among servicemembers and their families, along with the fact that eating disorders have the second-highest mortality rate of any psychiatric condition, demonstrates a need to ensure early intervention and access to treatment for this life-threatening illness.

“I’m pleased the SERVE Act will advance to the House floor as part of the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA),” stated **Representative John Katko (R-NY-24)**. “Eating disorders impact millions of Americans from all backgrounds. But for servicemembers and their families, some are not eligible to receive higher level eating disorders care under TRICARE due to their age. The SERVE Act, which I introduced with Congressman Seth Moulton and Congresswoman Veronica Escobar, extends the

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<sup>1</sup> Higgins Neyland MK, Shank LM, Burke NL, et al. Parental deployment and distress, and adolescent disordered eating in prevention-seeking military dependents. *Int J Eat Disord*. 2019;1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.231806>.

<sup>2</sup> Silas, Sharon. (August 7,2020). Department of Defense: Eating Disorders in the Military. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-611r.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Campagna, J. D., & Bowsher, B. (2016). Prevalence of body dysmorphic disorder and muscle dysmorphia among entry-level military personnel. *Military medicine*, 181(5), 494-501.

age limit for beneficiaries to the Medicare eligibility age for TRICARE coverage of eating disorders care. This bipartisan bill ensures those who served our nation, and their families have access to the support they deserve.”

“Having experienced an eating disorder that shortened my time in service, I can attest to the necessity of the SERVE Act’s ability to improve overall awareness of eating disorders in the military that would aid earlier detection and intervention for other servicemembers with eating disorders,” said **Chandler Sullivan, Army spouse and former Marine**. “More recently, [as a military spouse,] I have been able to reap some of the benefits of having access to residential treatment despite being a dependent over the age of twenty. The SERVE Act would afford other spouses the same opportunity to receive potentially lifesaving treatment.”

“The inclusion of the SERVE Act language supporting eating disorder treatment expansion within the House NDAA is a major step forward in ensuring that servicemembers and their families are able to access the eating disorders treatment they need and deserve,” said **Chase Bannister, MDiv, MSW, LCSW, CEDS, Board President of the EDC**. “The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action is proud to be at the table representing all those who serve and sacrifice for our country every day.”

*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 [eatingdisorderscoalition.org](http://eatingdisorderscoalition.org).*

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