Veterans suicide prevention legislation passes House and Senate

The Clay Hunt Prevention for American Veterans Act, a bill designed to help prevent suicide among the nation’s veterans, passed 99-0 in the Senate Tuesday, paving the way for the bill to soon become law.

Among its measures, the legislation requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to evaluate all its mental health care and suicide prevention programs and practices for effectiveness. The bill also calls for the creation of a VA website to house information for the department’s mental health services, broaden the access methods for veterans to seek mental health services through VA and address critical staffing shortages in the VA’s mental health care system by instituting a pilot student loan repayment program.

The bill was originally introduced last year, and was reintroduced with the new session of Congress, passing through the House in mid-January. The bill received its namesake from Marine Cpl. Clay Hunt, who dedicated his life post-military to helping other veterans cope with their struggles. Clay himself was dealing with depression and post-traumatic stress, and in 2011, succumbed to the difficult battles he was facing and ended his life.

“Suicide is one of the most devastating issues impacting all generations of veterans,” said DAV Washington Headquarters Executive Director Garry Augustine. “Getting veterans access to care and meeting their mental health needs is critical and we are hopeful this legislation will stem an epidemic facing our heroes and their families.”
The full text of the bill can be found here.