



OREGON PARTNERSHIP

lines for life

Preventing Substance Abuse & Suicide

2013 Session Bill #: SB762
Joint Committee on Pages: 2
Ways and Means Trans/Econ Dev Subcommittee
Date: 5/16/13 Exhibit #: 7

**Testimony to the Joint Ways & Means Transportation & Economic Development Subcommittee
By Judy Cushing, CEO of Lines for Life (formerly Oregon Partnership)
May 16, 2013**

**Testimony in Favor of SB 762
Support for Veterans Suicide and Prevention Outreach**

Co-Chairs Senator Johnson and Representative Jenson, members of the committee, my name is Judy Cushing, CEO of Lines for Life, a nonprofit that works to prevent substance abuse and suicide. I am here to update you on Veteran Suicides and the importance for Veterans to know how and where to get the help they need.

Veteran suicide is a growing problem. A Veteran takes his/her life every 65 minutes – that's 22 deaths each day. Veterans account for 27 percent of Oregon's suicides. These statistics are especially tragic as suicide is preventable. After selflessly serving our country, our veterans deserve the support and services available to them but many don't know how to access them.

Oregon is one of only 6 states in the U.S. that does not have a military installation. As a result, our veterans and active duty soldiers do not have a centralized hub of support services they can draw on, where large groups of veterans and soldier buddies reside, many of whom are experiencing the same transition, war trauma, PTSD and mental health issues. Oregon is largely a rural state and many, many of our veterans feel the sense of isolation. Access to services is often difficult.

Many veterans are confused and frustrated, and they have no idea where to get help. Some of them have had a negative experience with the red tape of government. Others are reluctant to admit they are struggling with mental health and addiction issues that can lead to suicide. That reluctance is based partly on the warrior mentality of "buck up" and the toxic stigma that surrounds mental illness and trauma.

These men and women are not broken. But if they don't have a safe place to reach out to without fear of repercussion or shame, veterans tend to keep their emotions bottled up until they just can't take it anymore. 30 percent of our veterans deal with PTSD, depression, anxiety attacks and other mental health illnesses but they are reluctant to seek help.

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We see the need of veterans every day on the Lines for Life Military Helpline. Last year we received 1,801 military-related calls from 32 of the 36 Oregon Counties. 175 of those callers reported persistent suicidal thoughts, 47 had previous attempts, 62 had a plan and 14 had set a time. You can learn more detail about the calls from data provided in the packets and via PDF's.

Oregon Partnership / Lines for Life's Military Helpline (1-888-HLP-4-VET) provides an anonymous place for veterans and their families to speak with veterans and counselors trained in military culture. The combination of anonymity, non-judgmental help from Vet peers and shared experience is powerful. It gives them a safe place to vent and to explore other options than taking their own lives or the lives of others. Our crisis counselors de-escalate 95 percent of the military-related suicide calls we receive.

Oregon vets and their families need to know where they can get appropriate help and they need to know the danger signs of suicide and severe mental illness. A sweeping effort to publicize relevant resources is imperative if we are to save lives.

We urge you to back our veterans by passing Senate Bill 762.