



## IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS OF AMERICA

June 20, 2007

The Honorable Pete V. Domenici  
328 Hart Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Domenici:

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) is pleased to offer support for S. 38, the Veteran's Mental Health Outreach and Access Act of 2007. Effective mental health care for returning veterans, a top priority for IAVA, reflects both a moral obligation to veterans and a step forward towards our military's future readiness.

With one in three returning veterans facing life-altering mental health issues, S. 38 addresses the need to develop increased capacity for counseling services while allowing the VA to maintain its role as a leader in dealing with issues unique to veterans. This bill would create peer outreach and support services for veterans and provide mental health counseling services for their families. S. 38 would expand current counseling capacity by contracting with local community health centers. Most importantly this bill would extend the period of time a veteran could receive treatment for certain illnesses without proving a service connection from 2 years to 5 years (another legislative priority for IAVA).

S. 38 would reinforce old and create new social support networks for returning veterans aiding in their readjustment to civilian life. Fellow veterans acting as peer counselors are able to share common experiences and reassure those suffering from PTSD and other reactions to the stress of combat that they are far from alone. Families who provide comfort and encouragement to veterans undergoing treatment for mental illnesses and other serious injuries will be provided the support they need to cope with their new challenges. By providing services that recognize the crucial role of immediate family members and peers, this legislation reinforces a foundation on which effective mental health care, free from stigma, can be built.

IAVA believes in the importance of making the voices of those who served on the front lines heard. Whether as part of the national dialogue on the needs of veterans or in peer counseling sessions, the participation of veterans in the healing process is a vital part of fulfilling our nation's promises to veterans. We are proud to offer our assistance and thank you for this meaningful legislation. If we can be of help, please contact our Legislative Director, Patrick Campbell, at (202) 682-3490 or [patrick@iava.org](mailto:patrick@iava.org).

We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Paul Rieckhoff  
Executive Director

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