



Pentagon opposes mental health program for Guard

By Gregg Zoroya, USA TODAY

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The Pentagon is urging Congress not to create a mental health program for **National Guard** soldiers that backers argue is necessary at a time when suicides among them are at record levels.

"I was really surprised that the **Department of Defense** decided to oppose this," said Sen. **Patty Murray**, D-Wash., chairwoman of the **Senate Veterans Affairs Committee**. "It's just a no-brainer to make sure that this is out there for every Guard and Reserve member wherever they live."

The Pentagon says the program, which would embed mental health workers in Guard and Reserve units when they train one weekend a month, is unnecessary and would be difficult to staff at a time when "mental health providers are in short supply nationally," according to **Defense Department** position paper.

However, advocates such as the National Guard Association of the United States say that a pilot program in California, using civilian counselors part-time, has helped link 16,000 state guardsmen with mental health services since its inception in 2006.

Murray released Pentagon data Thursday showing that more National Guard troops have died from suicide each of the past five years than were killed in combat or died of accidents or illnesses in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There were 146 suicides among non-active duty Guard and Reserve soldiers last year, pushing total Army suicides to a record level. This year through October, 98 non-active duty Guard and Reserve soldiers have

committed suicide, the Army says.

A **House** version of the Pentagon funding bill includes the program. Murray says that as the two chambers hammer out a compromise on Defense funding in days ahead, Pentagon opposition could kill it.

The program goal is to encourage troubled soldiers to seek counseling when they need it. The military already does something similar for active-duty units, embedding therapists both stateside and in the war zones.

TriWest Healthcare Alliance, a contractor with **TRICARE**, the military's health care plan, sponsored the California pilot program. The result was that among soldiers who went into

By J. Scott Applewhite, AP

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., says she's surprised a proposed mental health program for the National Guard was opposed. "It's a no-brainer," she adds.

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counseling, the percentage who self-referred increased from 36% to 57%, according to TriWest.

"That's the big hurdle, getting someone to talk to somebody," said Scott Celley, a TriWest spokesman.

The therapist are available to talk and, where serious issues arise, make referrals, in some cases to free community resources for soldiers who are unemployed or otherwise without health insurance, says Army Col. Darc Keller, with the [California National Guard](#).

About 40% of soldiers in one aviation unit recently returned from combat were without civilian jobs, Keller said.

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[Add a comment](#)**Anne Morris**

I say we revoke the pentagon's benefits and see how they feel about it.

[Reply](#) · [14](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · December 8 at 8:15pm**Jim Duckworth** · Wildlife and Nature Photographer at California wilderness

As a nation, we are responsible for all the mental and physical health concerns of our troops that arise due to their participation in combat. The pinheads in Washington DC can't ever seem to agree on anything, except how to raise money for their re-election campaigns.

[Reply](#) · [9](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · December 9 at 10:10am**Richard Rovet** · Dayton, Ohio

Jim you are spot on. The corruption in the government to include many brass in the military is sickening. Just look how Dover AFB and the USAF dumped warriors remainins in a landfill.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · December 11 at 5:54pm**Jim Duckworth** · Wildlife and Nature Photographer at California wilderness

Richard, What a great country we live in, but it is difficult at times to see the lack of integrity and ethical behavior from the politicians who are suppose to be leading us and making decisions for the good of the country and not just for themselves and their political party.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · December 11 at 6:08pm**Richard Rovet** · Dayton, OhioHey Jim, you are so right. I testified before congress on the illnesses I had witnessed concerning the use of the experimental anthrax vaccine on my fellow servicemen and women and the cover up that followed.
btw...nice fish Dorado?[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · December 12 at 11:44am[View 1 more](#)**John Whitty**

Yes, they may serve one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer but they are deployed and fight just like the active duty side and it suppose to be a total army.

[Reply](#) · [9](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · December 8 at 8:04pm**Martin Keller** · Top Commenter · Minnesota

I would like the Pentagon to divulge the percentage of troops that have served in the war zones are guardmen and reservists. Hardly a week goes by that I don't hear of another unit deploying and most have been on multiple tours. That is just in my state. When the tornado struck Greensburg, KS the state's guard was not able to respond because the bulk of their troops and equipment was in Iraq and Afghanistan. Pardon me... but that is SUPPOSED to be the function of the national guard. Why aren't the bloated active duty rosters the primary source?

[Reply](#) · [8](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · December 8 at 8:54pm**Ed Reiman** · Top Commenter

Mr President, please find EACH AND EVERY person at "The Pentagon" who opposes NG and Reserve Mental Health services AND FIRE THEM better yet ... how 'bout 6 months with a front-line outfit on Afghanistan!

[Reply](#) · [8](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · December 8 at 8:47pm**Michael Nephew** · Master Leather Grader at Tennessee Tannery

Pentagon pencil pushers couldn't handle a combat tour.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · December 10 at 8:28pm**Anne Morris**

I guess they don't consider the guard worthy... my son returns from AIT in 2 weeks, he's willing to give his life for a bunch of jerks who do not think his welfare is worth it...:((

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Our national guard members are serving their country. It is time that their country takes care of them. It is so sdd that the military is so unwilling to admit that service members have an injury unless they have a wound which is visually apparent. It is irresponsible not to provide mental health services for all of our service members including the national guard.

[Reply](#) · [4](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · December 9 at 10:44am**Mickey Cashen** · Top Commenter

The Pentagon has a nerve. My nephew spent 18 months as a sergeant in Iraq in 2006-7 leading (the officers found ways out of it) and cleaning up after blown-up convoys. Loud noises and similar problems bothered him on returning. His reward, from an America that claims to honor its veterans, was to drive

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