



State of Connecticut

SENATE

SENATOR DANTÉ BARTOLOMEO

Thirteenth District

**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 691
Veterans' Affairs Committee Public Hearing
February 17, 2015**

Chair Flexer, Chair Hennessy, and members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee:

I regret that, due to a legislative scheduling conflict, I am unable to testify in person. But I want to thank you for providing the opportunity for public input on my proposed legislation, SB 691, An Act Establishing a Veterans' Crisis Line.

This bill attempts to improve the support we provide the honorable men and women of the Armed Forces who have served our state and country.

I propose that the state of Connecticut establish a dedicated emergency/crisis hotline for our veterans. While there exists a national hotline which can be helpful for veterans seeking federal services, it is limited in its ability to assist those needing or seeking Connecticut-specific services and programs.

According to information provided to me by the Middlesex Veterans Council, Connecticut has approximately 27 different organizations skilled in assisting veterans with a variety of issues. Unfortunately, these groups do not currently work together; no network exists to provide comprehensive and collaborative assistance to those seeking information and assistance.

This independent operating model forces those in crisis to make multiple attempts to contact organizations in order to find help. This process is overwhelming and anxiety-provoking at the very least, and impossible for those most in need.

For example, a young vet came to a meeting of the Middlesex Veterans Council just over a year ago. He stated his desire to commit suicide. His father was contacted and took him to the West Haven VA immediately. Although recent reorganizations of the federal VA may have since addressed deficiencies in their services, at that time the young vet was told the facility was full and he should return in six weeks.

When his father, understandably, expressed disbelief and anger, it was suggested that the young suicidal vet could remain on a gurney in the hallway indefinitely. Luckily, this young man had a strong family support system and they worked with the Middlesex Veterans Council to find a suitable alternative.

This is just one example of many that I believe can be addressed by the establishment of a dedicated state veterans' crisis hotline, similar to our Domestic Abuse hotline, which links organizations together, is constantly updated as new services become available, and can triage calls from veterans seeking assistance or support. In an emergency situation, veterans could call the crisis line and be directly immediately to the appropriate service or agency for assistance, rather than flip through a phone book or search online trying to track down the appropriate contact, until they give up from frustration, anxiety, and exhaustion.

The men and women of Connecticut who have honored us with their dedicated service deserve our full support now that they are home.

I urge the committee to vote favorably on SB 691, and thank you for your consideration.