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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Bipartisan Veteran PEER Act Legislation Passes the U.S. Senate

*DBSA has been a key proponent of law that establishes peer specialists
in VA patient-aligned care teams*

CHICAGO, IL – January 26, 2017 – The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance is pleased to announce legislation authorizing implementation of the Veteran PEER Act was passed by the U.S. Senate today.

The Veteran PEER Act, introduced by U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and U.S. Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO), a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, will harness peer-to-peer relationships to more comprehensively treat veterans' mental health conditions.

DBSA has been a lead supporter of this bipartisan legislation that will ensure veterans who seek care at a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical/primary care center can connect seamlessly with a mental health or substance use provider through the engagement of a peer specialist.

"Our bipartisan legislation will establish peer specialists within VA medical centers to improve and expand upon existing veteran treatment and services. A veteran's unique relationship with a peer can help provide powerful and unparalleled emotional support – whether they are newly transitioning to civilian life, or seeking long-term care. Bolstering this kind of relationship among veterans is an effective way to enable more access to vital medical and mental health care," said Blumenthal.

"Strengthening the peer specialists program is a common-sense step to improve mental health treatment for our nation's veterans," said Blunt. "Peer specialists have first-hand experience in overcoming the challenges our nation's heroes face, whether it's navigating the VA or accessing treatment services. I urge my colleagues in the House to support this bill and help our veterans get the care they have earned and deserve."

Over a two-year period, the program would be implemented in 50 locations across the nation. It would take into consideration the needs of female veterans when establishing peer support programs and ensure that female peer specialists are made available to veterans through the plan. The VA also would be required to consider rural and underserved areas when selecting program locations.

To track progress and learn from the pilot sites, the VA would report regularly to Congress on the benefits to veterans and their families. Data will be collected on the gender of clients served by the program, as well as the role of peer specialists in engaging community providers and veterans receiving behavioral health services in the community.

DBSA Executive Vice President Allen Doederlein said, "The Veteran PEER Act will improve the link between primary and behavioral health care providers and increase patients' engagement

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in their own care. Peer support is an evidence-based practice shown to improve symptom management and reduce reliance on higher-cost clinical services while still achieving positive recovery outcomes."

DBSA was honored to support the VA as it executed a 2012 Executive Order to hire and train 800 peer counselors by December 31, 2013. DBSA assisted in developing the training curriculum and has trained over 600 peer counselors to date.

In addition to groundwork provided by DBSA in support of the legislation, support letters were submitted by many organizations as part of the Congressional Record when the bill was introduced in September 2017.

ABOUT DBSA

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) strives to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders. The organization fosters an environment of understanding of the impact and management of these life-threatening illnesses by providing up-to-date, scientifically based tools and information; supports research; and works to ensure that people living with mood disorders are treated equitably. Assisted by a scientific advisory board comprising leading researchers and clinicians in the field of mood disorders, DBSA has more than 600 peer-run support groups across the country. Hundreds of thousands of people are assisted each year with in-person and online peer support; readily understandable and current information about depression and bipolar disorder; and empowering tools focused on an integrated approach to wellness.

For more information about Depression and Bipolar or to find a support group near you visit www.DBSAlliance.org.