

Washington, D.C. – Today, Reps. Tom Rooney (R-Fla.) and Michael McMahon (D-N.Y.) introduced legislation to give TRICARE beneficiaries direct access to professional mental health counselors. The Counselor Accessibility Reform and Expansion for Soldiers Act, also known as the CARES Act, would allow anyone covered under TRICARE the same access to mental health care professionals that many covered under private insurance enjoy today.

“An important part of properly treating PTSD and other mental health problems facing our soldiers is to ensure them access to professional counselors,” said Rep. Tom Rooney. “I am happy to join together again with my friend Rep. McMahon in introducing the CARES Act to help improve access for our troops and their dependents to licensed mental health counselors. It’s time we give our men and women in uniform the access to the services they need and deserve.”

“We cannot overstate the need for adequate, efficient mental health services for our men and women in the Armed Forces,” said Rep. Michael E. McMahon. “Face to face counseling with mental health professionals is key to this goal. I applaud Rep. Rooney for introducing this bill and feel fortunate to have found a committed Member to partner with on this important issue.”

Today there are over 110,000 licensed professional mental health counselors in the United States. These licensed counselors have equivalent education, training and scope of practice to TRICARE providers who have independent practice rights. In 2006 the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act amended Section 7401 to explicitly recognize licensed mental health counselors as service providers for our nation’s veterans, yet TRICARE law continues subject all beneficiaries to a cumbersome and antiquated referral and supervision requirement. TRICARE beneficiaries include active duty service members and their families. There is no valid clinical or policy basis for continuing this outdated, inconsistent policy of requiring referral and supervision for use of professional counselors’ services. The CARES Act would allow all TRICARE beneficiaries direct access to licensed counselors.