

*Lawmakers Celebrate Tremendous Victory after Fighting for Eighteen Months to Increase Funding*

Washington, DC – Yesterday, Reps. Michael E. McMahon (D-NY) and Tom Rooney (R-FL) celebrated the biggest victory yet in their joint crusade to increase mental health funding for our soldiers and veterans. McMahon and Rooney announced that \$1,028,195,000 for medical research, Traumatic Brain Injury and Psychological health research, counseling and treatment programs has been included in the Defense Appropriations Act, which was marked up by the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee today. A vote on the bill is expected later this week.

The freshmen lawmakers partnered in March of 2009 and have since been consistent collaborators in the fight to provide our service men and women with proper mental health care.

Monday, they led a bipartisan letter signed by 58 Members to Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Norman Dicks and Ranking Member C.W. Bill Young requesting at least \$700 million for mental health programs, which is the same amount requested by Defense Secretary Gates. The Defense Appropriators reserved not only this amount but a considerable amount more. Of the over \$1 billion allotted for mental health care, \$669 million will go towards fulfilling the President's request to provide care for traumatic brain injury and psychological health. Over \$359 million has been reserved for traumatic brain injury and psychological health research.

"I hope it is abundantly clear from the Defense Appropriator's allotment that treating invisible wounds is a priority of this Congress," said Rep. McMahon. "These funds will provide for greater access and more options. As I've said before, easing the process for our service men and women seeking mental health treatment is crucial to reducing the alarming rates of suicide that are plaguing our Armed Forces. That is why it is imperative that the bill Congressman Rooney and I have proposed gets passed. Our returning service men and women need one-on-one counseling and we need to provide it in a way where there is no stigma attached to seeking help for the invisible injuries that are claiming so many of their lives."

Said Rep. Rooney: "After years of sweeping mental health problems among our military and veteran communities under the rug, I'm pleased that we're finally starting to address these issues head on and give our troops and veterans the help and support they need and deserve. This boost in funding is another good step toward addressing the mental health needs of our troops and veterans. I hope that Congress will soon take the next step by passing our bipartisan bill to require confidential mental health screenings for our returning war-fighters. We owe it to our troops and veterans to take action quickly and solve this growing problem."

June saw the highest number of suicides in the Army ever, so Reps. McMahon and Rooney have been fighting to get their two pieces of legislation passed. The Veterans' Mental Health Assessments and Screenings Act, which was introduced in March 2009 and would mandate one-on-one screenings for returning service men and women, was incorporated into the FY10 National Defense Authorization, but has yet to be implemented due to a shortage of mental

health staff in the Department of Defense.

Their second bill, the Counselor Accessibility Reform and Expansion for Soldiers Act (CARES Act), which was introduced on October 15, 2009, would give TRICARE beneficiaries direct access to professional mental health counselors without the requirement of having to get a referral or supervision. This would increase accessibility to mental health professionals for all TRICARE beneficiaries.

A fact sheet detailing Reps. McMahon and Rooney 's work on behalf of our service men and women, as well as a copy of the July 26, 2010 letter, are attached.

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