

### *Rooney's First Bill of 112th Congress Removes Barriers to Mental Health Counselors*

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney (FL-16) today reintroduced bipartisan legislation to combat climbing rates of mental illness and suicide among troops and veterans by giving TRICARE beneficiaries direct access to professional mental health counselors. The Counselor Accessibility Reform and Expansion for Soldiers (CARES) Act is the first bill introduced by Rooney in the 112th Congress.

“Every month, we hear tragic stories involving veterans and service members who are struggling with invisible wounds, like post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and depression,” Rooney said. “We owe the brave men and women who serve their country the best, most efficient mental health services we can provide.

“Face-to-face counseling with mental health professionals is critical to treating invisible wounds and preventing suicides, but too often, bureaucracy and red tape prevent troops and veterans from getting the care they need. The CARES Act would ensure that anyone covered under the TRICARE program has access to the mental health counselors they need and deserve.”

Under current TRICARE law, a beneficiary must receive a referral from a TRICARE provider before seeing a licensed mental health counselor. This requirement prevents many beneficiaries from receiving the care they need. The CARES Act would allow all beneficiaries direct access to licensed counselors by eliminating the referral and supervision requirements.

“Eliminating the outdated and cumbersome referral requirements will increase access to mental health professionals for all TRICARE beneficiaries,” Rooney said. “Streamlining this process will make it easier for our troops and returning veterans to get the care they need, when they need it.”

The armed services and veterans communities are facing the highest suicide rates in decades. For example, on Fort Hood, where Congressman Rooney served, 22 soldiers committed suicide in 2010, double the rate from 2009.

## Rooney Introduces Bill to Improve Mental Health Services for Troops, Veterans

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Rooney sits on the House Armed Services Committee. Rep. Larry Kissell (NC-8) is an original cosponsor of the CARES Act.

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