

H.R. 4305 – the Medical Evaluation Parity for Servicemembers (MEPS) Act of 2014

Help ensure our military is both mentally and physically fit. Bring mental health to parity with physical health in military recruitment evaluations.

COSPONSORS: Ryan (OH), Roe, Christensen, Napolitano, Kelly (PA), Jones, Marino, Bishop (UT), Barletta, Tsongas, Meadows, Fitzpatrick, McCaul

Supporting Groups: American Psychological Association, AMVETS, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), Reserve Officers Association (ROA), Reserve Enlisted Association (REA), Association of the U.S. Navy (AUSN), National Military Family Association, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)

- Behavioral health in the military is a serious issue. Recent studies found:
 - 1 in 5 Army soldiers enter the service with a psychiatric disorder
 - Half of all soldiers who tried suicide first attempted it before enlisting
 - A large percentage of suicides in the military were individuals who had never been deployed in a combat role.
- Currently, the Department of Defense (DOD) does a thorough physical assessment of individuals before they join, but no mental health evaluation.
- The DOD needs recruits that are both physically and mentally fit, and the behavioral health of incoming recruits is an acknowledged information gap.
- **The MEPS Act would bring mental health to parity with physical health by mandating a mental health assessment before enlisting.**
- This assessment can be used as a baseline to help identify changes in mental health throughout an individual's military career, such as PTSD, TBI, etc.
- The MEPS Act requires health records follow very strict privacy laws, and denies use of the assessment for promotions and assignments.
- Additionally, the MEPS Act requires a report from the National Institutes of Mental Health, in conjunction with other experts, which will make recommendations to the Department of Defense on best practices.
- This legislation is broad to allow DOD needed flexibility to implement the assessments, without burdening the recruiting systems in place.
- This bipartisan amendment is an effective measure that can make a real impact, with **no negative budgetary impact.**