

Submitter: Connie Hunter  
On Behalf Of: SB 420  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure: SB5506

Public Testimony /Letter to  
Hon. Senator Elizabeth Steiner, co-chair  
Hon. Representative Tawna Sanchez  
And the members of Oregon Legislature's Joint Ways and Means Committee

Thank you, Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and all the Oregon Legislature's Joint Committee on Ways and Means. I am here representing the Curry County Suicide Awareness and Prevention Council to suggest a very important priority for the upcoming biennial budget.

My name is Connie Hunter, Brookings, Oregon although I am a member of the Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America Umpqua Valley Chapter 805. In 2021 the national AVVA organization awarded their National Fellowship Award in 2021. In Curry County I am the Veteran Representative on the Curry County Suicide Awareness and Prevention Council, even though I am not a Veteran. Mt nephew was killed in Iraq, Sgt. John "Kyle" Daggett, Army Ranger. He received a massive wound to the head during a firefight and shrapnel removed the right side of his face. He lived for 10 days and aspiration pneumonia took his life. Had Kyle survived he would have been one of the many men and women who return from military service with brain injuries.

J am blessed to be here to celebrate democracy and to support Senate Bill 420 which will provide funding for brain injury navigators and an associated advisory council. Because we support the men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces, we support this legislation.

What we know about the veterans' experience, especially in rural areas, is that access to VA healthcare and other supportive services are difficult at best. We also know that when the V.A. does not perform, the responsibility falls back on the State. Senate Bill 420 will provide for gaps in care for our Veterans with brain injuries—and rural areas like Curry County where we have one of the highest per capita numbers of Veterans and have had the highest suicide rate among our Veterans.

After learning about the issues of traumatic brain injuries and the relationship to Veterans who die by suicide. this bill provides a missing piece of the service continuum that must be filled in order to fulfill the mission of the State of Oregon to serve those who have served us and guaranteed this democratic process that we are sharing tonight.

My comments are specific to Veterans, however, please note that the Curry County Suicide Awareness and Prevention Council has asked me to be their spokesperson tonight. The Council recognizes the relationship between brain injuries and suicide, homelessness, incarceration rates, mental health and behavioral health issues such as substance use disorder. Created by ordinance to address the suicide rates among our seniors, youth and veterans, we would hope that you hear our please loud and clear. The need is great, and the solution is SB 420.

Thank you,  
Connie Hunter  
Spokesperson