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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



**Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance**

**Bipartisan VA MISSION Act Passes Congress: New Law Will Help Integrate Behavioral Health Into the Primary Care Setting**

*DBSA has been a strong proponent of program to establish the use of peer specialists in VA patient-aligned care teams*

CHICAGO, May 29, 2018—The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) is pleased to announce that the recently-passed MISSION Act includes important language to provide peer specialists in treating mental health and substance use disorders at select VA primary care sites across the country. President Donald J. Trump has pledged to sign the bill into law in the coming days.

When it becomes law, veterans will be able to access this evidenced-based model of care at 50 locations across the country regardless of their VA health system entry point. Implementation of the program will emphasize both rural and underserved areas as well as employment of certified female veteran peer specialists.

DBSA has been a lead supporter of this bipartisan legislation that was first introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senators Blumenthal (D-CT) and Blunt (R-MO) as the PEER Act.

Speaking on the legislation earlier this year, Senator Blumenthal commented, “Bolstering this kind of relationship among veterans is an effective way to enable more access to vital medical and mental health care.”

Senator Blunt observed, “Peer specialists have first-hand experience in overcoming the challenges our nation’s heroes face, whether it’s navigating the VA or accessing treatment services.”

At present, VA peer specialists primarily are located in behavioral health settings. Given the stigma associated with veterans seeking care for mental health and substance use conditions, veterans using the VA for primary care may be missing a key entry point to the effective VA peer support model of care.

The PEER Act was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives in mid-May by Representative Scott Peters (D-CA) and Mike Coffman (R-CO). Upon introduction, Rep. Peters shared, “Men and women who have served our country may come to the VA seeking care and not know where to look for mental health services.”

According to Rep. Coffman, “The VA’s existing peer-to-peer counseling program has already seen great success. Integrating mental health counseling to the VA’s primary care teams provides an additional entry point to engage veterans suffering from PTSD or other mental health conditions.”

Speaking on behalf of DBSA, Allen Doederlein, Executive Vice President of External Affairs, stated, “DBSA is grateful to Senators Blumenthal and Blunt, and Representatives Scott and Peters for advancing this legislation. Because of their leadership, veterans will have greater access to services that support the

modeling of positive health-affirming engagement with VA treatment teams for both their mental and physical health.”

In addition to authorizing use of peer support specialists, the MISSION Act requires the VA to track the progress of and learn from the pilot sites by reporting regularly to Congress about the benefits of these services to veterans and their families.

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**The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)** strives to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders. The organization fosters an environment of understanding the impact and management of these life-threatening conditions by providing up-to-date, scientifically based tools and information; supports research; and works to ensure that people living with mood disorders are treated equitably. Assisted by a scientific advisory board comprising leading researchers and clinicians in the field of mood disorders, DBSA has more than 600 peer run support groups across the country. Hundreds of thousands of people are assisted each year with in-person and online peer support; readily understandable and current information about depression and bipolar disorder; and empowering tools focused on an integrated approach to wellness.

**For more information, please visit [www.DBSAAlliance.org](http://www.DBSAAlliance.org) or call (800) 826-3632.**