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**Summary of legislation included

**KENNEDY INTRODUCES NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MENTAL
HEALTH LEGISLATION**

WASHINGTON, DC— Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy introduced the National Guard and Reserve Mental Health Access Act, which will provide greater access to mental health services for the National Guard and Reservists.

The legislation calls for the implementation of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, which will provide counseling, education, and family services to returning Guard and reservists, establishes a pilot project to examine new applications of technology in tele-mental health, and creates a Joint Psychological Health Program in the National Guard Bureau to oversee and coordinate support for Guard members with mental illness or brain injuries.

Senator Kennedy said, “The National Guard and Reserve Mental Health Access Act is a three part approach to targeting the mental health needs of a specific population of our armed forces that require specialized access to care and services. It’s our duty to give our National Guard and Reserves the best possible treatment, whatever their injury. Mental conditions should be treated with the same care and concern as physical conditions. Our National Guard and Reserves make incredible sacrifices for our country and we owe them the very best access to care possible.”

(As Entered into the Record)

Today, I introduce the National Guard and Reserve Mental Health Access Act, which provides greater access to mental health services for our members of the National Guard and Reserve.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are taking an excruciatingly high toll on veterans and their families and the nation obviously needs to give greater priority to their mental health needs, including the National Guard and the Reserve.

As of April 29, 2008, 31,848 service members have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thirty percent of our soldiers struggle with brain injuries, mental illnesses, including post traumatic stress disorder and depression, or a combination of these physical and mental wounds.

Earlier this month, the RAND Corporation released a report documenting the alarmingly high numbers of veterans who struggle with mental health problems and brain injuries. One in 5 of these brave men and women report mental health problems.

These mental health problems take various forms, including post traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicidal tendencies and substance abuse, and they can persist for months or even years after their service. Some will never be the same again.

It's our duty to give our National Guard and Reserves the best possible treatment, whatever their injury. Mental conditions should be treated with the same care and concern as physical conditions.

This bill calls for the implementation of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, which provides counseling, education and family services to returning members of the Guard and reservists. It establishes a Joint Psychological Health Program in the National Guard Bureau to oversee and coordinate support for Guard members with mental illness or brain injuries, and it creates a pilot project for providing new applications of technology in tele-mental health and anti-stigma treatment.

The National Guard and Reserve Mental Health Access Act is a three part approach to targeting these mental health needs, which require specialized access to care and services.

Our National Guard and Reserves make incredible sacrifices for our country and we owe them the very best access to care possible.

Summary of the National Guard and Reserve Mental Health Access Act of 2008

Why is this bill necessary?

Our veterans make incredible sacrifices for our country. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are taking a physical toll on our men and women in uniform, but they're taking a mental toll too. These mental health conditions take various forms, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, suicidal tendencies and substance abuse. These problems can persist for months, or even years after their service. Some veterans will never be the same again.

Who would this bill primarily help?

Members of the National Guard and Reserves: This bill will provide assistance to the thousands of soldiers in our nation's Guard and Reserves who are facing PTSD, depression and other mental health issues, as well as traumatic brain injuries.

As of April 29, 2008, 31,848 service members have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thirty percent of our soldiers struggle with brain injuries, mental illnesses— including PTSD and depression— or a combination of these physical and mental wounds.

What would the bill do?

The legislation establishes a Joint Psychological Health Program within the National Guard Bureau to coordinate and oversee the National Guard's efforts on behalf of its soldiers with mental illness and traumatic brain injuries (TBI).

The bill requires the timely implementation of the successful Yellow Ribbon Program that was recently enacted to provide transition assistance and services to newly reintegrated members of the Guard.

It also establishes a demonstration program for use of tele-mental health technology to provide mental health services for Guard and Reserves.

Finally, the bill provides for creation of an anti-stigma campaign targeted towards reducing the stigma that may prevent some members of our armed forces from seeking needed mental health care and treatment.

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