



February 21, 2014

Representative Les Gara  
Alaska State House  
**REF: HB 313**

Les,

I was very pleased to receive your bill, HB 313 An Act relating to mitigation at sentencing in a criminal case for a defendant found by the court to have been affected by combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder or combat-related traumatic brain injury.

This is the first I've heard of this notion and I'm very pleased to support it.

As most of you know we have been researching the problem of veteran homelessness now for six years in our effort to end veteran homelessness in Anchorage and then Alaska. Believe me, lots to read and think about. One of the determining factors significantly contributing to veteran homelessness is combat related PTSD and minor TBI. I make a specific note to "minor" TBI as serious TBI is usually very obvious and severely disabling. But we are just beginning to understand, and technology is just beginning to help see minor TBI and how it changes behavior.

In addition to PTSD and minor TBI the abrupt separation of a service member from the camaraderie they experienced in service, often for the first time in their lives, and very much so in a combat theatre, the transition back into civil society is very difficult especially when you don't have family or friends as your support group. This often manifests itself in anger and violent behavior towards others and themselves. Often not out of malice but out of a sense of survival under stress.

The best work on combat PTSD is *Once a Warrior Always a Warrior* written by the Department of Defense colonel responsible for understanding this challenge. Anyone who works with combat veterans must read this book if they are to truly understand the challenge. This is not a curable it is only a treatable, but we are making significant progress in that area.

Allowing a judge and hopefully a prosecutor to consider combat related PTSD and minor TBI in relationship to a violent act that may be criminal is an important step in helping these men and women navigate their way home – even with missteps. Thank you. This is truly a compassionate consideration.

We at the Alaska Veterans Foundation, Inc. are strongly in support of this bill. We have forwarded it to 49 other states through the National Conference of State Council Presidents of Vietnam Veterans of America in hope that other states will consider similar legislation.

If I or our team can be of any further assistance in looking at this legislation or similar bills of concern, please call.

Again, thank you. It is an honor.

  
Ric Davidge, Chairman