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Understanding PTSD is a first step toward helping veterans

SB 129 is part of a series of bills related to Ballot Measure 96

SALEM – The Oregon Senate passed a bill today that calls on the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs' Advisory Committee to give a recommendation on forming a task force to study issues related to diagnosing and treating post-traumatic stress injuries.

Senate Bill 129 – which passed the Senate on a 29-0 vote – is geared toward helping veterans who may be suffering from post-traumatic stress in the aftermath of their military service, as well as first responders or anyone else who may have experienced trauma that has triggered the syndrome.

“The first step toward helping people who suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome is to understand it,” said Sen. Chuck Riley (D-Hillsboro), who sponsored the bill and carried it on the floor and is, himself, a military veteran. “This is a huge issue among our veteran population. They put themselves on the line for all of us and this country. We need to understand how to help them deal with their day-to-day lives after they have experienced traumatic and sometimes horrific events first-hand. We need to make sure that they are taken care of. This bill is a good first step toward doing that.”

Experiencing or witnessing trauma – including exposure to combat or other dangers while serving in the military – can result in harmful injuries even long after the initial trauma. More than 50 percent of the population experiences trauma at some point in their lives. About 7 to 8 percent on average will be diagnosed or treated for post-traumatic stress-related injuries at some point in their lives. First responders and those who serve in the military can be exposed to greater trauma than the average member of the public, due to the dangerous requirements of those occupations.

Of the more than 325,000 veterans living in Oregon, 10 to 30 percent are estimated to have post-traumatic stress injuries. Even more may report only some symptoms. The percentage of veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress injuries varies depending on where the veteran served, as well as the veteran's individual experience.

Senate Bill 129 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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