



*****MEDIA ADVISORY*****

Veteran Mental Health Leadership Coalition and Reason for Hope in Coordination with Senators Booker and Paul to Host Briefing on Breakthrough Therapies Act: “Accelerating Breakthrough Therapies for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention”

Event to Be Held on Wednesday, March 13 at 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. in 385 Russell Senate Office Building

March 11, 2024 (New York, NY) – [Reason for Hope](#), a non-profit mental health and suicide prevention advocacy organization, and the [Veteran Mental Health Leadership Coalition](#) (VMHLC) – in coordination with **Sen. Cory Booker** (D-NJ) and **Sen. Rand Paul** (R-KY) – will host a briefing and update on the [Breakthrough Therapies Act](#) (S.689; H.R. 1393) called, “Accelerating Breakthrough Therapies for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.”

Lt. General Martin Steele, USMC (Ret.), co-founder of Reason for Hope and president of the VMHLC, said, “Suicide rates have continued to climb over the past two decades, reaching alarming levels. Veterans suffering from both major depressive disorder and PTSD are at particularly increased risk. The Breakthrough Therapies Act can help accelerate patient access to treatment for these conditions, so it is critical that Congress swiftly pass this bipartisan legislation. We must not delay getting our nation’s heroes the help they need and deserve.”

Brett Waters, Esq., co-founder and executive director of Reason for Hope, said “This week marks the six-year anniversary since I lost my mom – Sherrie Hope Waters – to suicide. Reason for Hope is named in her memory. I can’t help but think my mom would have immensely benefited from access to Breakthrough Therapies like MDMA or psilocybin therapy. Unfortunately, this is a lingering question I live with, and will never have an answer. However, on behalf of the many others out there struggling, for whom it is not too late, I urge Congress to pass the Breakthrough Therapies Act. This common sense legislation can save many lives.

Who:

- Lt. General Martin Steele, USMC (Ret.), founder and president, VMHLC; and co-founder & CEO, Reason for Hope
- Brett Waters, Esq., co-founder & executive director, Reason for Hope
- Dr. Lynnette Averill, co-founder & chief science officer, Reason for Hope & VMHLC; associate professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences & clinical director of the Emerge Research Program, Baylor College of Medicine



When:

- Wednesday, March 13th
- 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Where:

- 385 Russell Senate Office Building

To RSVP, please email rfh@kcsa.com.

Background on America's Mental Health Crisis:

For far too long, current treatments for serious mental health conditions and suicide have proven insufficient, with suicide rates higher now than 20 years ago. Our nation's Veterans face the most strenuous burden, as veteran **suicide rates are estimated to be around 57% higher** than for non-veteran adults. Moreover, Veterans with co-morbid major depressive disorder and PTSD are more than twice as likely as those with PTSD only to have attempted suicide.

Fortunately, in recent years, the FDA granted its coveted Breakthrough Therapy Designation to MDMA-assisted therapy for the treatment of PTSD and to two psilocybin therapies for treatment-resistant depression and major depressive disorder. **In clinical trials with these drugs, 71% of participants receiving MDMA-assisted therapy no longer qualified for a PTSD diagnosis, and 50% of participants receiving psilocybin therapy no longer qualified for a depression diagnosis.** Encouraging medical research and FDA approval of these drugs would bring lifesaving change to tens of millions of Americans:

- 21 million with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)
- 13 million with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- 2.8 million with Treatment-Resistant Depression (TRD)

Bipartisan & Bicameral R&D Reform: On March 6th, 2023, Senators Booker (D-NJ) and Paul (R-KY) introduced the Breakthrough Therapies Act (BTA) in the Senate (S.689) and Reps. Dean (D-PA) and Mace (R-SC) introduced the BTA in the House (H.R.1393). The BTA would amend the Controlled Substances Act's definition of "currently accepted medical use with severe restrictions" to include drugs that receive the FDA's Breakthrough Therapy Designation or approval for an Expanded Access Program, allowing Schedule I breakthrough therapies for mental health to be rescheduled to Schedule II. This re-designation would reduce barriers to research and enable compassionate use under the federal Right to Try Act. **Crucially, the bill is able to accomplish these goals with no cost to the taxpayer and no changes to regulations preventing recreational usage of these therapies.**

The BTA is Congress' only bipartisan and bicameral bill to address this issue, and is supported by a wide range of lawmakers, including Senate MilCon/VA Appropriations Subcommittee Ranking Member John Boozman (R-AR), House Veterans Affairs Health Subcommittee Chairwoman Mariannette Miller-Meeks,



Congressional Neuroscience Co-Chairs Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) & Morgan Luttrell (R-TX), and Freshman House Democratic Leadership Members Jasmine Crockett (D-TX) & Robert Garcia (D-CA). Over 50 organizations have endorsed the Breakthrough Therapies Act, including the Veteran Mental Health Leadership Coalition, Navy SEAL Foundation, Reason for Hope, Reason Foundation, Heroic Hearts Project, No Fallen Heroes, BrainFutures, REID Foundation, Grunt Style Foundation, and Black Therapists Rock.

About [Reason for Hope](#)

Reason for Hope is a non-profit mental health and suicide prevention advocacy organization focused on advancing safe and affordable access to psychedelic therapies. Reason for Hope's work includes educating government officials and various stakeholder groups on the scientific and legal landscape for psychedelic medicine, developing pilot programs for those most in need, and building broad coalitions of patient advocates, mental health professionals, and other experts to develop and advocate for policy reforms needed to reduce barriers and safely increase access to psychedelic and other breakthrough therapies. Reason for Hope's co-founders and multi-disciplinary leadership team includes Lieutenant General Martin Steele, USMC (ret), Lynnette Averill, PhD, and Brett Waters, Esq.

The Veteran Mental Health Leadership Coalition ("VMHLC") is a national member-based Veterans organization that brings together the leadership of various Veteran Service Organizations, researchers, and veteran mental health providers with expertise in psychedelic medicine to exchange ideas and advocate for increased veteran-focused research funding and safe, affordable access to psychedelic therapies for Veterans and their family members. LtGen Steele serves as president of the VMHLC. For more information, please visit <https://www.reason-for-hope.org/> for follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#).

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