



May 24, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR THE STATE DIRECTORS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Re: o2 Project - Get Outside Day

You may recall that I spoke at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs mid-winter conference in Pentagon City last February. At the end of that briefing, I announced the partnership between Military-Veterans Advocacy (MVA) and the Benjamin Ware Legacy Fund (BWLf) to collaborate in the o2 Project - Get Outside Day. The concept behind this project is to provide a low-cost positive therapy for veterans, and others, who suffer from Traumatic Brain Injury, Post Traumatic Stress, depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges.

The statistics on veterans' suicide are simply horrific. In 2021 there were 519 active-duty suicides. An additional 6,146 veterans died by their own hand in 2020. According to the VA, the unadjusted rate of suicides in 2020 among veterans was 31.7 per 100,000. After adjusting for sex and age, the rate of veteran suicide in 2020 was 57 percent higher than non-veteran adults. In other words, more veterans died in 2020 than in two decades of fighting in Iraq and as many as died in Iraq and Afghanistan combined. More veterans have died by suicide in the last 10 years than military members of the Armed Forces who died from combat in Vietnam.

Congress has highlighted the problem and allocated billions of dollars to combat it. There has been progress, but too often it is mired in the bureaucracy of accounting and paperwork. The joint MVA-BWLf initiative is a high impact low cost easy to adopt program. The second Saturday in June (June 10, 2023) is designated as Get Outside Day! Veterans, their friends and families are urged to participate in some sort of outdoor activity such as: fishing, hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, walking or just sitting in a chair and soaking up the sun. Participants should be encouraged to engage in follow-on activities the following weekends. Our follow-on program that we call Ten-a-Day calls on veterans to spend ten minutes a day outside doing nothing but experiencing nature.

The State of Louisiana has taken the initiative to designate the second Saturday of June as Get Outside Day and urging Congress to do so on a national level. Senate Resolution 206 and House Resolution 387, currently pending before Congress, will accomplish that.

On behalf of Military-Veterans Advocacy and the Benjamin Ware Legacy Fund- o2 Project I ask you to support this initiative on June 10, 2023, and urge the veterans in your State to participate in the o2 Project - Get Outside Day. We also ask that you urge your State Legislatures to adopt similar resolutions next year and in future years. We hope that you will use the attached materials on your web site, social media pages, media releases as well as all of your

correspondence with your service officers. You can also find a number of thirty second videos on the MVA "You Tube" Page that you can use to promote the event.

<https://www.youtube.com/@militaryveteransadvocacy2990/shorts>

Will this program resolve all veteran mental health challenges? Of course not. But we believe it will help. A full 50 State approach to urging veterans to embrace nature and its healing treatments can only result in veterans feeling better about themselves and appreciating the wonders that life and our beautiful country provides us. We also ask that you solicit pictures of veterans enjoying nature on June 10th and send them to us for publication.


The Get Outside Day! is a beginning and not an end. Subsequent activities will increase the benefits, and our Ten-a-Day Program will bear further fruitful results.

We hope that you will embrace this program and join us on June 10th and beyond. Anytime - Anywhere - Just Get Outside.

Yours for veterans,



John B. Wells
Chairman
Military-Veterans Advocacy



Rachel K. Ware
Executive Director
Benjamin Ware Legacy Fund – o2 Project