The American Legion

★ WASHINGTON OFFICE ★ 1608 "K" STREET, N.W. ★ WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006 ★
(202) 263-2986 ★

OFFICE OF THE
NATIONAL COMMANDER

January 8, 2013

Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
SD-224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
SD-152 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member:

On behalf of the 2.4 million members of The American Legion, I would like to express support for the *Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Act* introduced by Senator Al Franken and Representative Richard Nugent. This legislation is important for veterans especially regarding the intersections between the criminal justice system and the mental health fields.

As America has seen our veterans return home from combat overseas, sadly we have also witnessed some of our veterans who self-medicate with drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with mental health issues such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) – the "signature wounds" of our modern wars. The 2004 Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (MIOTCRA) supported collaborative approaches to address the needs of individuals with mental health conditions in the criminal justice system.

The *Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Act* reauthorizes and improves the critical programs in MIOTCRA. As an organization in every town in America, large and small, The American Legion has seen firsthand the positive impact that veterans courts supported by MIOTCRA can have for veterans who are at risk.

The American Legion's Resolution 119, passed at our National Convention in August 2012 in Indianapolis, Indiana recognizes how important it is to get the veterans the help they need to prevent recidivism, and help reintegrate these veterans who have sacrificed so much, back into the communities they served to defend.

The American Legion supports enacting the *Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Act*, and applauds your leadership in addressing this critical issue facing our nation's veterans and their families.

Sincerely,

James E. "Jim" Koutz

JAMES E. 'JIM' KOUTZ
National Commander