To whom it may concern,

My name is Dawn. I am a fellow member of the community that JJ resides in.

JJ is the quiet and funny one. He's always got something on his mind. He's always been cordial and friendly. He is an observer and is cautious. He is the one to jump in and lend a hand because he's the first one to notice that a hand is needed. He is the one you can count on.

I'm deeply concerned about how we treat veterans when they're in crisis. I have a BS in Human Services and I minored in Psychology. Prisons and jails are meant for punishment and rehabilitation – they are focused on control. Psychiatric hospitals and extended care are focused on treatment and recovery, providing a safe and structured environment for healing – exactly what JJ was looking for when he called the crisis line - *help*. The mind is a vast, miraculous wonder, full of thoughts and ideas. The average civilian hasn't seen and been through the things that a veteran has. A civilian may have similar thoughts and ideas but because they don't have the same experiences to draw ideas from, they aren't charged with domestic terrorism. The average civilian isn't threatened with added stress of legal battles when they call 988 and a veteran shouldn't be either. Anybody calling a crisis line should be treated with respect, supported with care and treatment options, and should not fear legal battles because they cried for help. This veteran fought for his country and the rights that we have. He fought to keep us safe. The government that he fought for has turned on him and that is entirely unjust.

The barriers to services that veterans experience are insurmountable. The "red tape" often makes it near impossible for people to navigate the services that they fought for and earned. **If we send the message that calling the crisis line because we are mentally unwell will lead to legal battles, and therefore added stress, I fear that our veterans and our community will further decline and suicide rates will increase.** I hope that you will keep JJ's story and these points in mind when working on bills such as S.193 & S.181. Our veterans need your support and right now, JJ is in a position where he needs all of our help and advocacy. I hope that his story enhances services for veterans in the best way possible. This is a time for change and solutions, and I am putting my faith in you to help accomplish this.

With sincere gratitude,
Dawn Mitchell