



MARCH 4, 2008

CHICAGO – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today proclaimed March Brain Injury Awareness Month in Illinois to increase public awareness and understanding of brain injuries and to urge the state’s Veterans to get screened for a possible traumatic brain injury (TBI) through the new Illinois Warrior Assistance Program.

The Illinois Warrior Assistance Program is a first in the nation program that screens all returning Illinois National Guard members for a TBI while offering the screening to all Illinois Veterans. The program also includes a 24-hour toll-free confidential, psychological helpline - 1-866-554-IWAP (4927) - staffed by health professionals to assist veterans, day or night, suffering from symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Information about the program can also be found at www.illinoiswarrior.com.

“There is no denying that our returning service members are facing a serious problem when it comes to brain injuries. In Illinois, we are trying to tackle this problem by offering traumatic brain injury screening to all Veterans through the Illinois Warrior Assistance Program. I am proclaiming March ‘Brain Injury Awareness Month’ in Illinois to increase public awareness about brain injuries and to let Veterans and service members know that the state of Illinois is here to help them get the care they need and rightfully deserve,” said Gov. Blagojevich.

Each year in the United States, approximately 1.4 million persons sustain a TBI. According to the Army Surgeon General’s Task Force on Traumatic Brain Injury January 17th report, “TBIs have been called one of the signature wounds of the current conflicts” yet “it is unknown how many Soldiers have suffered a TBI during OEF/OIF.” It goes on to say that “the TBI screening of over 35,000 redeploying Soldiers has revealed a 10-20 percent rate of a mild TBI while deployed” and that “systemic, Army-wide screening for TBI upon redeployment is not currently practiced.”

“The increased use of improvised explosive devices in the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan has resulted in more Veterans suffering from traumatic brain injuries,” said Tammy Duckworth, Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs. “Too often mild traumatic brain injury goes misdiagnosed or untreated resulting in the Veteran and their family unnecessarily suffering mentally, physically, and emotionally. We hope that Veterans and their family members will use the Illinois Warrior Assistance Program to get the help they need. I want to urge you, if you are a Veteran, call our 24-hour toll-free helpline or visit any one of the state’s 51 Veteran Service Offices to get screened.”

The Illinois Warrior Assistance Program provides confidential assistance for Illinois Veterans as they transition back to their everyday lives after serving our country. Its goal is to help

service members and their families deal with the emotional and psychological challenges they may be facing. The program has three major parts:

- First, it offers a 24-hour, toll-free helpline at 1-866-554-IWAP (4927), which is staffed by health professionals to assist Veterans, day or night, with the symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- Second, it provides Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) screening to all interested Illinois Veterans over the phone via the helpline or through the State of Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA) Veteran Service Officers (VSOs).
- Third, it makes TBI screenings mandatory for all returning members of the Illinois Army National Guard and Air National Guard.

If a Veteran has a positive screening for PTSD or TBI and is uninsured or underinsured, he or she could be eligible for additional diagnostic review and treatment for PTSD or TBI through the Program.

If you are a Veteran or service member suffering from symptoms associated with PTSD, or if you think someone you care about may be experiencing post-deployment stress or other combat-related emotional issues, call the Illinois Warrior Assistance Program confidential 24-hour toll-free helpline, 1-866-554-IWAP (4927) for more information and help. You can also visit www.illinoiswarrior.com for more information about the program.

The text of the Governor's proclamation follows:

WHEREAS, traumatic brain injury is largely preventable, yet it is among the nation's most significant public health concerns, currently affecting at least 5.3 million Americans; and

WHEREAS, while an estimated 80,000 to 90,000 Americans with traumatic brain injury experience permanent disability from their injury, traumatic brain injury often results in significant impairment of an individual's physical, cognitive and psychosocial functioning, impacting their ability to return to school and/or work; and

WHEREAS, a substantial portion of individuals with traumatic brain injury and their families do not have access to appropriate support and services, and remain unserved or underserved. The lack of public awareness is so vast that traumatic brain injury is known in the disability community as the "silent epidemic;" and

WHEREAS, in January, my administration launched a new initiative called the Illinois Warriors Assistance Program to target this "silent epidemic" among returning Illinois National Guard members and veterans. The program, the first of its kind in the nation, screens returning Illinois National Guard members for a traumatic brain injury while offering screening to all Illinois veterans, and a 24-hour toll-free psychological helpline for veterans suffering from symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; and

WHEREAS, while not a panacea for traumatic brain injury, the Illinois Warriors Assistance Program is a start, and I'm proud that, once again, Illinois

is leading the way and establishing a model that can be used by other states and the federal government; and

WHEREAS, to raise more awareness about this serious problem, the Brain Injury Association of America has recognized March as Brain Injury Awareness Month, and here in Illinois, we are pleased to join in this important campaign:

THEREFORE, I, Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim March 2008 as BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS MONTH in Illinois, and encourage all citizens to join in the efforts to spread knowledge of this critical health issue.