

United States Senate

July 14, 2022

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420.

Dear Secretary McDonough,

We write to raise our serious concerns regarding the Veteran Healthcare Administration's refusal to provide adequate access to community care as authorized by the VA MISSION Act of 2018. Veterans across the country are subject to unacceptably long waiting periods to receive care or have appointments continually rescheduled because the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) refuses to follow guidance and statute created by the MISSION Act. Veterans deserve access to quality health care in a timely manner and the VA's failure to do so and willful disregard for established standards is unacceptable.

The VA MISSION Act modernized the Veterans Community Care program, which prescribed clear and concise access standards and eligibility criteria to ensure veteran access to non-VA providers. These standards, which passed both the House and Senate by overwhelming, bipartisan majorities in 2018, preserved and enhanced vital care for veterans subjected to overly long waiting times to receive care, those who live in rural areas without access to VA care facilities, or those who are best served by non-VA care as determined by their doctor. The MISSION Act's innovations promised to provide care for underserved veterans across the country, but the VA currently stands in the way of fulfilling that promise.

On a weekly basis, our constituents voice concerns and present evidence that the VA is ignoring these guidelines in an effort to reduce community care, and ultimately deny mandated care to eligible veterans. In some cases, the VA is rescheduling care without the veteran's consent. In other cases, the VA is seemingly ignoring the veteran's best medical interest. Most alarmingly, there are reports of internal VA training materials that are actually pushing to reduce community care while the VA decommissions and closes the Office of Community Care and shuts down the VA Mission Act website (missionact.va.gov). These essential policies and program offices were stood up to prevent the tragedies of the Phoenix Waitlist Scandal and are directly linked to protecting the quality and accessibility of veteran health care.

Additionally, there have been significant concerns with the timeliness of which Congress has been able to both simply schedule briefings and receive requested data. During your confirmation hearing, you stated that "the free flow of accurate data is the lifeblood of a well-

functioning organization.” We urge you to reassess whether this commitment is being upheld, and the collaborative relationship that you hold with your stakeholders in Congress.

We ask you reaffirm the VA’s commitment to veterans and your relationship with Congress by addressing the VA’s apparently intentional non-compliance with the spirit and legal standards of the MISSION Act. We look forward to prompt communications with our offices, your immediate action to ensure complete veteran access to community care, and an immediate reversal of any VA practices or policies that violate the law.

Sincerely,



Steve Daines
United States Senator



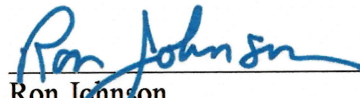
Mike Braun
United States Senator




Rick Scott
United States Senator



John Thune
United States Senator



Ron Johnson
United States Senator



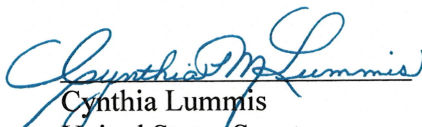
Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator



Ted Cruz
United States Senator



Cynthia Lummis
United States Senator