

# HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

CHAIRMAN MIKE BOST

## Complete the Mission Act of 2024

### Background:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system provides care for approximately 7 million veteran patients each year. In 2014, Congress uncovered a nationwide access crisis in which veterans across the country were unable to receive VA healthcare in a timely manner. Congress immediately took action to ensure that veterans had choice and timely access to care – whether inside or outside VA. This included the enactment of the *MISSION Act of 2018*, which required VA to establish access standards for primary, specialty, and mental health care in VA medical facilities and through VA's private, community healthcare partners. The partnership between VA and community-based healthcare providers has had a confirmed, positive impact on the quality of medical care made available to veterans across the country, especially those living in rural and remote parts of the country. Unfortunately, Congress' oversight efforts of the implementation of the *MISSION Act* have shown that VA is often undermining its own Community Care Program. During the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, and under the management of the Biden-Harris administration, VA has publicly acknowledged their goal of reducing community care referrals and bringing more care in-house. This has slowed down veterans' access to care and hinders the intent of the *MISSION Act* by reducing veterans' healthcare choice.

*The Complete the Mission Act of 2024* would continue to make the VA health care system more accessible and accountable to the veterans it serves. It would codify current access standards and require VA to publish their wait times for all VA medical centers, setting a baseline expectation for timeliness of care. Further, this bill would establish a defined access standard for the provision of residential substance abuse treatment, recognizing that when a veteran in an addiction crisis decides that help is needed, time is of the essence. Finally, this bill would require VA to be more transparent with veterans when they are deciding their best options for care, whether at VA or through a community-based provider.

### The Message:

- Community care is VA care. Having the choice for where they receive their health care results in more quality healthcare options for veterans.
- When a veteran recognizes the need for residential substance abuse care and seeks that help, there should be no delay in providing what could be life-saving care.
- The *MISSION Act* is not optional, it is the law. If a veteran is denied access to community care, there should be full transparency into their options for care, reasons for denial, and avenues for appeals.
- *The Complete the Mission Act of 2024* would ensure veterans are educated on their health care choices and ensure they always have timely options for quality healthcare to meet their needs.