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June 6, 2023

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I write to you regarding my complete frustration with the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) lack of timely action to provide community care to veterans that not only qualify, but are in dire need of timely care.

Like you, one of my top priorities is to take care of veterans by ensuring they have access to the timely care they have earned. However, I continue to hear stories from veterans across the country that remind me of the unnecessary daily bureaucracy that veterans endure.

One specific veteran trying to receive community care for their Stage I kidney cancer was recently brought to my attention. The VHA facility told this veteran they were considered "grandfathered" for community care, as they qualified under the previous Choice Act 40-mile rule; therefore, the VA facility submitted a request. However, after two months of this veteran requesting updates on the status of their request, they were informed the community care office that they no longer qualified for "grandfathered" status as a resident of California and because the veteran could supposedly make it to the hospital in under an hour. The veteran drives over 50 miles to reach the VA medical center in their area, which easily takes more than one hour.

Ultimately, the veteran reached out to my staff, who worked with VHA Central Office (VACO) to get them the care they deserve. Initially and under their first review, VACO informed my staff that the veteran had a short wait time and did not surpass the drive time requirements for community care access. My staff then reminded VACO of the MISSION Program eligibility for care, which in this case, clearly exceeds timeliness and drive time standards. Exactly one week from when my staff contacted VACO, and after four months of the veteran attempting and being denied community care, the veteran was finally called and told that they do indeed qualify.

This is just one example of the many cases my staff handles on a daily basis and does not account for all the veterans that are struggling to navigate the system on their own. Mr. Secretary, community care is veteran care, and I will work tirelessly to ensure veterans receive

the timely access to care that they need, deserve, and the law entitles them to receive. The MISSION Act was enacted over five years ago and it is imperative that veterans receive accurate information when they reach out to VA for assistance.

I hope you share my frustration. These roadblocks do not serve veterans well and we must do better.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please contact Christine Hill, my Health Staff Director, at Christine.Hill@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



MIKE BOST
Chairman

Cc: The Honorable Mark Takano, Ranking Member