

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4313

August 11, 2021

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

Each and every veteran that serves our country deserves to have easy access to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care and benefits that they have rightfully earned. While many veterans choose to retire and work in communities with close access to a VA facility, almost a quarter of all veterans in the United States return from military careers to reside in rural communities.¹ We want to work with you to ensure that these veterans in our districts, and countless others, are not excluded because of where they choose to live.

According to the VA Office of Rural Health, 4.7 million veterans choose to live in rural communities.² They do this for many reasons, including proximity to friends and family, open space for leisure, increased privacy, and lower cost of living. There are many benefits to rural living, but unfortunately, these veterans have historically faced significant challenges when trying to receive quality care. These issues are only amplified when considering these veterans' service-connected conditions or injuries.

The issues that rural veterans face are not due to neglect, or a lack of desire for quality care. In fact, 58 percent of rural veterans are enrolled in the VA health care system, which is 21 percent higher than the enrollment rate for urban veterans.³ Despite this fact, rural communities can face challenges such as less access to care, fewer physician practices, less overall infrastructure to support the level of care needed, fewer transportation options, greater distance barriers, and limited broadband internet.

While we appreciate the VA's work in establishing the Office of Rural Health, as directed by Congress through passage of the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information

¹ "Office of [Rural](#) Health: Rural Veteran Health Care Challenges 2021." VA.Gov: Veterans Affairs, www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/ruralvets.

² "Office of [Rural](#) Health: Rural Veteran Health Care Challenges 2021." VA.Gov: Veterans Affairs, www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/ruralvets.

³ "Office of [Rural](#) Health: Rural Veteran Health Care Challenges 2021." VA.Gov: Veterans Affairs, www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/ruralvets.

Letter to Secretary McDonough re VA Care for Rural Communities

Technology Act of 2006, we want to ensure that we all do our part to continue to provide quality care for those who bravely served our country. As such, it is imperative that the Office of Rural Health serve as a liaison for these communities as we identify ways to increase the overall access to care for rural veterans through creative solutions, cross-agency collaboration, public-private partnerships, and improved rural broadband. We were pleased that the VA's Fiscal Year 2022 budget request included increased funding for telehealth services and rural veteran transportation services. We look forward to working with you to ensure these initiatives are supported with adequate funding to improve healthcare outcomes for veterans.

We urge you to prioritize and give your personal attention to this important population of rural veterans. We stand ready to assist you in whatever way we can. Please do not hesitate to contact us directly to further discuss this matter.

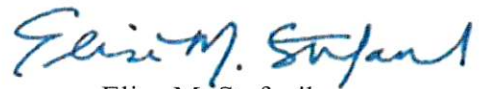
Sincerely,



Ronny L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader



Elise M. Stefanik
Member of Congress



A. Drew Ferguson IV, DMD
Member of Congress



Mike D. Rogers
Member of Congress



Michael T. McCaul
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