

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

August 9, 2018

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and thank you for your willingness to serve in this position. Veterans deserve a VA leader committed to improving and strengthening the care they need and have earned. We look forward to working with you to ensure that our veterans have the support they need to thrive in civilian life.

Veterans in New Hampshire face a number of challenges when attempting to access VA services. These challenges include the lack of a full-service VA hospital, the difficulties of finding health care in rural areas, and the deteriorating condition of the infrastructure at the Manchester VA Medical Center (VAMC). The *Boston Globe* last year detailed serious allegations of unsafe practices and administrative indifference at the facility.

Along with more difficult access to the full range of medical services that the VA is duty-bound to provide, New Hampshire's veterans have had to contend with unacceptable conditions at the VAMC. As you know, the main building was built in the 1940s, and a significant portion of the facility's infrastructure has exceeded its expected lifecycle, including nearly all underground utility lines and water and sewer piping both inside and outside the building. According to your April 13 letter to us, "Nearly all facility infrastructure and utility systems were identified as deficient and have been forecast for replacement over the next 10 years."

In response to the issues highlighted in the *Globe*, the VA put together the VA New Hampshire Vision 2025 Task Force (Task Force) to reexamine VA care in New Hampshire and make recommendations for a path forward. The Task Force released its final report in June, including 29 recommendations for actions to improve VA services in Manchester. Many of the recommendations reflect priorities we have long supported, such as improving mental health and pain management services to prevent substance misuse; expanding access to telehealth care; creating a comprehensive ambulatory surgical care center; strengthening ties between the Manchester VA and nearby medical schools and other institutions of higher education; and expanding services for women veterans, who are an important, growing population with unique

needs. The key now will be ensuring that these recommendations are quickly and effectively implemented.

Given the deficiencies in the current system, we urge you to comply with then-Acting Secretary Peter O'Rourke's concurrence to all 29 recommendations and swiftly direct appropriate resources to implement the recommendations developed by the Task Force after months of investigation of services at the Manchester VA, including numerous listening sessions with providers, employees, and most importantly, veterans. New Hampshire veterans deserve your guarantee that they will receive the high-quality health care they have earned.

The Manchester VA is already making progress on several of the Task Force recommendations, but others – such as a new ambulatory surgical center and a whole health community care center – will require specific capital allocations. We call on you to consider all the measures available to the VA to make these recommendations a reality, including directing existing resources appropriately, examining the possibility of partnerships with existing medical facilities or medical space to operate out of as the VA evaluates its construction options, prioritizing the analysis of the necessary pre-construction reports, appointing a permanent Director for the New England Healthcare System, and working with Congress to swiftly make additional resources available as needed. As the VA works to implement these recommendations it is critical that extra consideration is given to avoid disrupting services for those New Hampshire veterans that rely on the Manchester VA given the lack of a full-service hospital and other challenges that our state's veterans have faced. Additionally, we call on you to consider all possible avenues to quickly improve the 380 infrastructure systems graded "D" or "F" in the facility's most recent triennial facility condition assessment.

We also urge you to consider the needs of those in New Hampshire's "North Country" who primarily rely on VA facilities outside of Manchester. While we applaud the recommendations of the Task Force, most were specific to the Manchester facility. Veterans in the North Country also contend with access issues due to the lack of conveniently located VA infrastructure. While we unanimously supported the VA MISSION Act to provide improved access to quality healthcare for veterans who have long struggled to access VA services, we also request renewed attention to the needs of our North Country veterans that require more VA services co-located in their rural communities. The VA must redouble its commitment to ensuring that veterans without full VA services are provided with access to the complete range of medical treatment that the VA can and should provide.

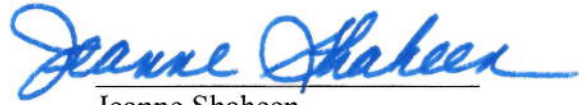
We would also like to formally invite you to visit New Hampshire to meet with our veterans, VA personnel, and tour the New Hampshire VA facilities. We were glad to host past VA secretaries in New Hampshire in recent years and we would welcome you to come as well.

Once again, congratulations on your new position, and we look forward to working with you to help support our veterans in New Hampshire and around the country.

Sincerely,



Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Carol Shea-Porter  
Member of Congress



Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress