

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

May 10, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write to you today to express our grave concern with the recommendations the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) submitted to the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission, pursuant to Title II, Subtitle A of the VA MISSION Act. These recommendations are the first step in a long process that will require the approval of both the White House and Congress before any VA facilities may be closed, relocated, or downsized. The VA's recommendations are based on faulty data and assumptions that fail to consider the actual needs of West Virginia Veterans and the capacity of West Virginia's healthcare network to meet those needs. If enacted, these recommendations would gut three of our four VA Medical Centers (VAMC). We urge you to reject these recommendations outright and direct the AIR Commission to hold public roundtables with VA leadership and local Veterans community leaders in West Virginia before finalizing any recommendations.

The VA has recommended that the Clarksburg, Beckley, and Huntington VAMCs all discontinue inpatient medical and surgical services. Those are sweeping recommendations that would deeply impact Veterans' access to care and they were made without measuring the local civilian communities' workforce and ability to take on the influx from that decision. 54 of the 55 counties in West Virginia are designated partial or whole health professional shortage areas (HPSA), with only enough staff for 70% of the licensed hospitals beds.

By redirecting Veterans to these already under-staffed rural hospitals, it would further exacerbate wait times, staff shortages, and reduce health outcomes for Veterans and rural patients alike. West Virginia's rural status relies on a delicate balance between small rural hospitals, and larger rural referral centers. The closure of any one facility puts significant pressure on the rest of the system. Rural patients are, on average, older and sicker, and West Virginia has the most vulnerable population in the country, making our current HPSA status an already tenuous position.

During surges of the current COVID-19 pandemic, West Virginia hospitals experienced critical capacity requiring patients to be transferred out of state. As we have seen over the past two years, the VA is vital to our national emergency response plans. In West Virginia Veterans have

been able to safely and easily take COVID-19 tests and almost 150,000 have received vaccines and booster shots at their local VA facilities. For many of those Veterans, there may be no other viable option for care like that in their area.

As illustrated in a recent Government Accountability Office titled “Incomplete Information Hinders Usefulness of Market Assessments for VA Facility Realignment”, the VA used faulty data to make these harmful recommendations. We request that the AIR Commission hold public roundtables with VA leadership and local Veterans community leaders in West Virginia while assessing the recommendations to understand the concerns and impacts they would have in the local communities.

Veterans have put their lives on the line to protect this country. They deserve consistent, accessible, quality care when they return. That’s the promise we made to these brave men and women when they took their oath to serve. Our delegation is West Virginia strong, and we intend to keep that promise. We look forward to collaborating with you further on how we can maintain quality care for Veterans across the nation without cutting services or access in our state.

Sincerely,



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator



David B. McKinley, P.E.
United States Representative



Carol D. Miller
United States Representative



Alex Mooney
United States Representative