

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 24, 2022

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

Dear Secretary McDonough,

We write on behalf of the veterans of Southeastern Pennsylvania, who are rightfully concerned about the future of their care and access to services provided by VA medical centers (VAMC) and facilities following the release of the VA Recommendations to the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission on March 14, 2022.¹

We understand that these recommendations were conducted in accordance with the VA MISSION Act of 2018, which was signed into law before many of us were elected to Congress and before you were appointed to your position. We also realize these are, at the moment, only recommendations to the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission and are not finalized. However, we are extremely concerned about the process for developing these recommendations and their potential impact on the healthcare provided to the veterans we serve.

To begin, our offices had very little notice in advance of VA coordinated listening sessions with local stakeholders concerning the development of these recommendations and insufficient time to review the information. The methodology and approach to assessing local stakeholder concerns was not thorough or sufficient to ensure all impacted veterans were provided an opportunity to express their concerns. Furthermore, the questions posed during the listening sessions did not include an assessment of concerns surrounding the closure of existing medical facilities. We are worried that the needs and voices of the veterans of Southeastern Pennsylvania were not heard or considered during the development of these recommendations.

We are also deeply concerned that the recommendations consistently refer to non-VA community providers as having sufficient resources – staff and beds – to accommodate the increase in demand from veterans who currently receive care at the Coatesville VAMC, Philadelphia VAMC, and other community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) that the report identified for restructuring or closure. This data was compiled before the COVID pandemic and before multiple medical facilities in Southeastern Pennsylvania announced their closure. We believe that if the same research were done today, it would show drastically less capacity from community providers to adequately provide care to these veterans.

¹ <https://www.va.gov/AIRCOMMISSIONREPORT/docs/VISN04-Market-Recommendation.pdf>

Finally, we note that in a recent statement, you said that VA wouldn't close some facilities because they serve historically underserved minority populations and rural veterans. In fact, you said, "if we reduce our presence in those markets, there wouldn't be enough good options in the community. Instead of downsizing those markets, we're doubling down on it, because that's the only way to guarantee that vets who live there get the care they need." In direct contradiction to your stated intent, closing the Coatesville VAMC and restructuring the Philadelphia VAMC would be a significant and dramatic downsizing of access for these communities, not a "doubling down" on services. Additionally, relocating services to King of Prussia, PA or Wilmington, DE will pose an undue hardship to many veterans in the SEPA region as public transportation is very limited and additional costs of private transportation continue to increase.

We implore you, as the Commission commences its review, to take the time to listen to the concerns of our veterans and to consider updated data. We ask that you conduct further outreach, and coordinate outreach efforts through our offices, so that we can help ensure all veterans in our communities have an opportunity to weigh in on an issue that directly impacts their care. We also ask you to be transparent in your processes and proactively provide critical information surrounding the outcome of the Commission to Congress so that we may better prepare and inform our communities on the status of these recommendations.

Our veterans and their families are concerned, and we are concerned for them. Many veterans in our communities worry about their continuity of care, extended drive times, and all together loss of access to care and other benefits and services provided by the VA medical centers highlighted in these recommendations.

We look forward to working with you to ensure these veterans, who sacrificed so much for our nation, do not lose access to the critical care and benefits our nation owes them for their service and sacrifice.

Sincerely,



Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



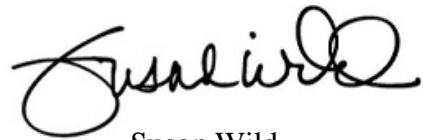
Brian Fitzpatrick
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