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The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington D.C., 20510

Dear Chairman Isakson:

The Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA), a professional nonprofit organization of nurses employed by VA, would like to offer our support for S. 2921, "The Veterans First Act."

We commend the Committee's bipartisan work to improve and strengthen the process for veterans using community care, particularly VA's role in coordinating that care and section 271 which requires prompt payment standards for contractors. NOVA members reported that many veterans were being denied services or turned over to bill collectors due to issues with coordination among contractors. We are happy to see the Committee looks to improve that process for veterans.

NOVA strongly supports language that addresses opioid over-prescription among veterans – a growing crisis in this country; and applauds the expansion of caregiver benefits to all generations of veterans. We also agree and support language that improves whistleblower protections, and ongoing management training for all VA staff.

We are pleased to see the bill includes "Moment of Silence" language which recognizes and honors our service members and veterans by raising awareness of their sacrifices in a positive way.

Although we recognize and support the need for competitive pay for VISN Directors and Medical Center Directors, we were disappointed that the bill did not include nurses – who remain the largest number of employees within the VA health care system. VA Leadership acknowledges nurses are at the heart of VA care and retaining, as well as recruiting, the best qualified candidates should be a priority.

As Congress looks to improve health care at VA facilities, NOVA remains committed to providing our input and support to ensure those who served have access to the best care in the world. We look forward to working with the Committee to make sure nurses remain an active part in any decision which will enhance the veterans' VA experience.

Sincerely,

Sharon Johnson, MSN, RN-BC, President
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA)