

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

February 4, 2019

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

As the 116th Congress convenes, we write to encourage you and your senior leadership team to work collaboratively with Congress as you implement major, simultaneous changes to veterans' health care and benefits programs.

During the 115th Congress, we worked in a bipartisan manner to pass twenty-five pieces of major veterans' legislation, including significant reforms to community care, appeals, accountability, and education benefits. Just five months from now, VA must begin operating the new Veterans Community Care Program that was created in the VA MISSION Act. This will fundamentally transform the delivery of veterans' health care. VA will concurrently implement provisions from other laws, including the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act (Accountability Act), the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act (Colmery Act), and the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act (Appeals Modernization). All of these changes will be happening as VA implements the Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) project, one of the largest information technology modernization projects in our nation's history.

Since your confirmation, your team has provided staff-level briefings – albeit somewhat limited in scope and details – on the status of implementation of the VA MISSION Act, the Accountability Act, the Colmery Act, Appeals Modernization, and EHRM. As we begin a new Congress, we expect regular, detailed briefings to continue and that you will take a collaborative approach that maximizes transparency and demonstrates your intent that Congress be a full and true partner in implementation of these critical laws and initiatives.

With all of the reforms underway simultaneously, it is vital for VA to share information openly – even pre-decisional information – so that we can work together and have a common understanding of the impact of changes, including costs, and are able to assess the impact any changes will have on other parts of VA. We share the common goal of VA's success, and our hope is that early, frequent, and fully transparent dialogs will allow VA and Congress to jointly head off the kind of serious missteps we have seen in some recent implementation efforts. All of the changes being implemented require VA to be more open, transparent, complete, and candid when engaging with Congress in the critical implementation stages of these programs. Specific to the VA MISSION Act, we request the data used to inform your decision on the proposed access standards, the projected number of veterans expected to access care, any impact on VA's internal ability to provide care to veterans, and an implementation plan for the proposed access standards.

We are hopeful that under your leadership VA can build a more collaborative relationship with Congress in the near-term. We look forward to a cooperative partnership between Congress and VA in order to effectively carry out all of the many new programs and initiatives underway that will make VA the model for 21st century delivery of health care and services to veterans.

Sincerely,



Johnny Isakson
Chairman
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee



Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee



John Boozman
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs,
and Related Agencies



Brian Schatz
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs,
and Related Agencies



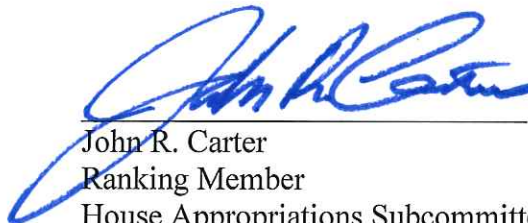
Mark Takano
Chairman
House Veterans' Affairs Committee



David P. Roe, M.D.
Ranking Member
House Veterans' Affairs Committee



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs,
and Related Agencies



John R. Carter
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs,
and Related Agencies