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September 3, 2020

Richard A. Stone, M.D.
Executive in Charge
Veterans Health Administration
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Dr. Stone,

I am writing today concerned that certain spouses and survivors are unable to utilize health care benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) because they are not provided adequate information on the complicated rules surrounding Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) eligibility. In particular, my office was recently contacted by a formerly-eligible dependent in Montana who did not receive information about what actions were necessary to maintain her eligibility for CHAMPVA in a timely manner and was subsequently removed from the Program.

According to VA's Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 budget submission, CHAMPVA served nearly 377,910 beneficiaries in 2019 and the number of beneficiaries is expected to rise to approximately 540,000 in 2021 and 560,000 in 2022. Furthermore, according to the Congressional Research Service, in FY 2018 there were approximately 2,517 CHAMPVA-enrolled beneficiaries in Montana. Spouses of 100 percent service-connected, permanently disabled veterans and certain survivors are relying on this Program to provide needed health care services. Therefore, I ask for your help in better understanding VA's communication with beneficiaries, especially during the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, so that I can gain a better understanding of VA's efforts to ensure certain spouses and survivors are able to maintain their eligibility for health care. Please respond to the following questions:

1. What information is provided to newly-enrolled CHAMPVA beneficiaries?
2. What specific steps does VA take to contact CHAMPVA beneficiaries to notify them of specific requirements to maintain eligibility for the Program, including enrollment in Medicare Parts A and B?
3. If VA sends periodic notification letters to CHAMPVA beneficiaries about these requirements, how does VA ensure that beneficiaries actually receive such information? For example, my constituent received a Welcome Aboard Packet and a CHAMPVA Handbook, but none of the three reminder letters the Agency typically sends or a phone call about pending disenrollment.

- Given my constituent did not receive reminder letters, possibly due to a technical error, is VA reviewing other CHAMPVA beneficiaries files to ensure they received such reminders?
 - Does VA call CHAMPVA beneficiaries prior to removing them from the Program?
4. Can VA waive the Medicare Parts A and B requirement and reenroll beneficiaries in CHAMPVA? If so, under what circumstances?
 5. Does VA need any additional resources or action from Congress to help with the CHAMPVA Program due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Dr. Stone, I appreciate your attention to my concern that dependents and survivors of veterans receive the information they need to remain eligible for CHAMPVA. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs