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April 3, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

We write today to encourage you to take immediate action on the temporary authority to form agreements with telecommunications companies that Congress recently gave the Department through H.R. 748, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, or Coronavirus Phase III package. This authority is intended to give VA all the tools necessary to provide mental health services to veterans, who may be at increased risk of suicide due to the social isolation caused by COVID-19, through telehealth and VA Video Connect. Further, this temporary authority allows the Department to expand coverage of these services to veterans previously ineligible.

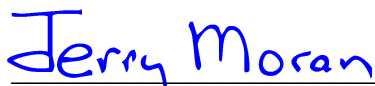
The COVID-19 public health pandemic has forced veterans and all Americans into social isolation in an effort to slow the spread of the virus. While this is the appropriate public health course of action to quell an infectious disease, this isolation will lead to unintended mental health consequences and perhaps a higher number of suicides during this time.

Veterans with underlying mental health conditions, including clinical-level anxiety and depression, those who live alone or who already have subjective feelings of loneliness, those concerned about employment and their financial situations, and those with a history of self-medication using alcohol and drugs, are all at an increased risk of suicide during this time. Additionally, veterans who live in rural areas, medically underserved and unserved parts of the U.S. may also be at increased risk, and are also in need of these enhanced mental health services. Unfortunately, many veterans who are at increased risk of suicide lack reliable and cost-efficient access to fixed broadband and mobile connectivity services.

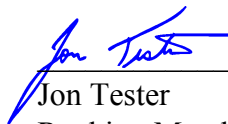
To date, we have noted with strong interest the pro-consumer efforts taken by many telecommunications companies during this pandemic to enhance the connectivity of Americans. From offering complimentary fixed and mobile broadband services to families with school-aged children and college students to taking the Federal Communications Commission's "Keep Americans Connected Pledge," hundreds of broadband providers have committed to prioritizing their customers in this time of uncertainty. These efforts are intended to provide the tools that Americans need to continue their education, reach necessary medical resources, participate in the interconnected global economy, and stay in communication with family and friends. It is this type of resourcefulness and assistance from the private sector that will ensure our nation emerges from this crisis stronger, and that our veterans and all Americans have everything they need to overcome this emergency.

Thank you for your work in ensuring our nation's veterans have the support they need during this time, and we look forward to working together with you on this matter.

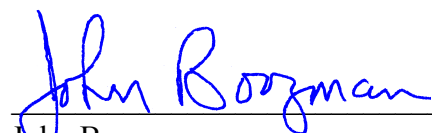
Sincerely,



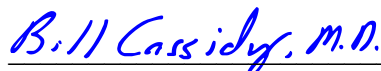
Jerry Moran
Chairman



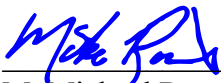
Jon Tester
Ranking Member



John Boozman
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



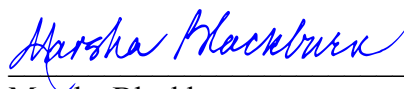
M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



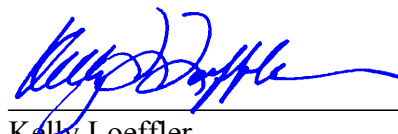
Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Kelly Loeffler
United States Senator