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January 25, 2022

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

We write today to request the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provide veterans with access to no-cost, at-home COVID-19 test kits, given the unprecedented surge of COVID-19 and the omicron variant across the nation. The Biden Administration has taken important steps to require private health insurers, State Medicaid programs, and Children's Health Insurance Programs (CHIP) to cover U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-authorized at-home COVID-19 tests without cost-sharing, and we must ensure veterans are not left behind in this effort to expand testing access.

Veteran COVID-19 cases continue to reach all-time highs. You also noted in your January 18 press conference that veteran COVID-19 admissions to VA hospitals reached another record high this month. As of January 19, the Department recorded 55,202 veterans with active COVID-19 infections, 3,175 of whom are hospitalized at VA. Further, nearly 13,000 VA health care employees were unable to report to work due to COVID-19, more than double the amount at last winter's peak. Veterans deserve to have every available tool to protect themselves and their families from COVID-19, and at-home tests are one useful approach for limiting the spread within communities and VA facilities.

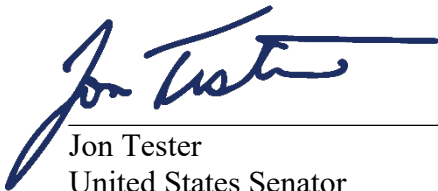
Currently, VA is not providing or mailing out at-home coronavirus test kits to veterans, citing increasing demand and "Department medical facilities can offer free in-person tests in many circumstances." However, this may limit access for veterans living in rural or remote areas, veterans with transportation or childcare needs, or veterans with mobility limitations. Further, under Section 6006(b) of Public Law 116-127, the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* (Families First), VA is required to cover FDA-authorized COVID-19 testing with no cost-sharing for veterans for the duration of the public health emergency.

In addition, Congress has appropriated billions in COVID-19 funding to support veterans and the Department's operations throughout the pandemic. VA received \$60 million from Families First, nearly \$20 billion from P.L. 116-136, the *CARES Act*, and more than \$17 billion from P.L. 117-2, the *American Rescue Plan Act* (ARP). Of the nearly \$14.5 billion appropriated for VA medical care in the ARP, the Department has only obligated \$458 million of this funding, as of January 18, 2022. With this level of resources, VA should be able to fulfill its statutory obligation to provide veterans with at-home COVID-19 testing with no cost-sharing.

Further, the President has taken numerous actions to expand at-home testing to Americans, and veterans should be a key focus of this effort. In addition to requirements that private health insurers and State Medicaid and CHIP programs cover the cost of at-home COVID-19 testing, the Biden Administration has also provided 50 million free, at-home tests to community health centers and rural health clinics across the country through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. VA should similarly be allocated tests by the Administration to keep veterans and their families safe.

Those who have served our country in uniform and receive health care services at VA deserve to have equal access to no-cost, at-home COVID-19 testing, just as those in the private sector. These tests could be used before planned gatherings, before attending a VA health care appointment, or when symptoms arise but the veteran is far from the nearest VA. We thank you and the entire VA workforce for your dedication to caring for veterans throughout this pandemic. We hope you will take timely action to deliver parity for those who have selflessly served our nation.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Jerry Moran
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator