

Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Tester, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on bipartisan legislation that I have introduced, the *Veterans ACCESS Act*.

I am proud to be working across party lines with Senator Moran on this bipartisan reform.

Together, with the Disabled American Veterans, the American Legion, AMVETS and Paralyzed Veterans of America, we are working to help ensure that no matter where they receive treatment, our veterans will find the quality health care they need, deserve and have earned. The simple premise of this legislation is that a health care provider who is suspended or fired from the VA should not be able to serve veterans seeking care through the Choice Program and other care in the community programs.

This is a commonsense reform. If a doctor can't treat our veterans in a VA facility, that doctor shouldn't be able to treat our veterans in their own communities as well.

Currently, a loose patchwork of VA regulations intend to stop fired or suspended VA providers from participating in VA-administered community care programs.

However, VA's lack of consistent implementation of national standards at the local level, including in Wisconsin, demonstrates that Congress must act and not leave veterans' health and safety to chance.

The *Veterans ACCESS Act* would require the VA Secretary to deny or revoke the eligibility of a healthcare provider to participate in community programs if that provider is fired from the VA, violates his or her medical license, has a Department certification revoked, or breaks the law.

In Wisconsin, a doctor was suspended from treating patients at the VA while under investigation for deadly prescribing practices for which he was later fired.

However, in the intervening time between his suspension and firing at the VA, he opened a private practice and was alleged to have been trying to see former VA patients.

I wrote to the VA to ensure that he could not see patients through the Choice Program and the VA responded that since his Wisconsin medical license was suspended, he could not see any patients. However, that temporary suspension was later overturned by a state administrative law judge and from April 2016 until January 2017, this doctor had a valid Wisconsin medical license.

In last year's appropriations legislation, at my request, Congress directed the VA to report back on existing VA policies that ensure no healthcare providers removed for misconduct subsequently become providers through community care programs.

The VA sent back a laundry list of regulations without ever answering the very simple question of whether or not a healthcare provider removed from the VA could see a patient through the Choice Program.

Our legislation will ensure that the answer to this question is unquestionably **"no"**, and it will provide Congress the needed oversight to ensure that the VA successfully implements Congressional intent.

I look forward to working with the Committee to addressing any concerns that arise from today's hearing and I want to thank the Veteran Service Organizations testifying later today for their support of this bipartisan legislation – including Disabled American Veterans, the American Legion, AMVETS and Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Thank you.