

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 23, 2025

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

We write with urgent concerns about the Presidential Memorandum issued on January 20, 2025, which instituted an immediate hiring freeze, with few exceptions, across the federal civil service. Veterans have earned and deserve the best quality health care and benefits possible. Delivering on that sacred promise starts with ensuring the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has the appropriate personnel in place to serve them. As written, this Memorandum could dramatically impair the ability of veterans across the country to get the care and benefits they desperately need. It could also delay or deny various other services across VA – from burial services to job training to assistance for homeless veterans to life-saving assistance from the Veterans Crisis Line. That is why it is imperative for you to provide an immediate, clear, and full exemption to this hiring freeze for VA so it can continue to deliver on its sacred mission for veterans.

In your Memorandum, little detail is provided to understand the scope of its exemptions. And despite assurances that VA benefits would be exempt, we have become aware the hiring freeze will extend to the Veterans Benefits Administration – a decision that will dramatically impact the processing of disability claims, growing the backlog and making it more difficult for veterans to access their earned benefits, including those promised in the PACT Act. Additionally, there is no explicit exemption for employees serving the more than 9.2 million veterans enrolled in VA health care.

Veterans deserve the best care possible from the best medical professionals in the country. To deliver on that obligation, VA continues to utilize various hiring authorities and incentives provided by Congress to address chronic medical workforce shortages, particularly in rural areas. Instead of building upon those efforts, one of your first actions was to stop them entirely, and to issue new directives to VA personnel across the country to not only leave vacancies unaddressed, but to revoke job offers that have already been made. That betrays trust with veterans on day one of your Administration, and betrays trust with prospective VA employees intent on serving veterans – an action that will undoubtedly have long-term impacts on VA's ability to effectively recruit and retain the physicians, nurses, and other critical positions that make VA the preferred option for care for veterans.

Mr. President, to prevent the delay or denial of life-saving services and benefits for our nation's heroes, we urge you to provide an immediate, clear, and full exemption to VA personnel from your hiring freeze. Thanks largely to the PACT Act and the leadership of the Biden Administration, VA is providing more care and more benefits to more veterans than at any time in its history. We are hopeful to work with you to build upon our nation's promise to these men and women, but we also vow to fight every effort that dishonors their service and reneges upon that sacred promise.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senator



MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senator



CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO
United States Senator



MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator




MARK R. WARNER
United States Senator



JACK REED
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



JEFFREY A. MERKLEY
United States Senator



TINA SMITH
United States Senator



RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senator

Maggie Hassan

MARGARET WOOD HASSAN
United States Senator

Patty Murray

PATTY MURRAY
United States Senator

Jon Ossoff

JON OSSOFF
United States Senator

Tim Kaine

TIM KAINÉ
United States Senator

Ben Ray Lujan

BEN RAY LUJAN
United States Senator

C. A. Booker

CORY A. BOOKER
United States Senator

Mark Kelly

MARK KELLY
United States Senator

Rubén Gallego

RUBEN GALLEGO
United States Senator

Alex Padilla

ALEX PADILLA
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen

JEANNE SHAHEEN
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin

TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse

SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen

JACKY ROSEN
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar

AMY KLOBUCHAR
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter Welch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke extending across the middle of the name.

PETER WELCH
United States Senator