

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 4, 2021

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary-Designate
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary-Designate McDonough:

We write today to express our concerns regarding the continued reports of VA patients being sent to out-of-state or far-away health care facilities for medical appointments. We know this pandemic has created many challenges to providing veterans quality health care, and we know that resources at many hospitals grow scarce as the number of COVID cases continue to rise. However, forcing veterans, who are often critically vulnerable to the risk of infection, to cross state lines or travel great distances is not an appropriate solution.

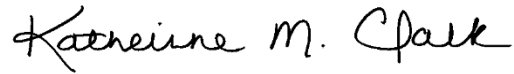
We have received numerous complaints from constituents and Veterans Service Officers of veterans being asked to travel across state lines, during a global pandemic, in order to receive health care or Compensation and Pension examinations. This continues despite many states having strict quarantine and travel orders. In Massachusetts alone, we have received reports of veterans being asked to travel to Connecticut, New Hampshire and Rhode Island for appointments, including a veteran with Multiple Sclerosis who had to drive 210 miles round trip in a blizzard to an appointment in Connecticut. Furthermore, many veterans report being classified as a “no show” when they object to crossing state lines, putting their disability compensation at risk.

There are also numerous reports of veterans being forced to travel great distances within state lines. While not a foul of quarantine regulations, this still presents a serious risk to the vulnerable veterans who seek health care. One veteran from outside Boston reported being sent to Western Massachusetts for his appointment, a 206-mile and 4-hour round trip. This is simply unacceptable and would seem at odds with the MISSION Act, which stipulates that a veteran can receive care closer to their home if the closest VA care is more than a 30-minute drive for standard care and a 60-minute drive for specialty care.

We owe our veterans the best health care we can provide and sending them across New England during a global pandemic falls far below those standards. Accordingly, we would like to know why veterans are being sent across state lines during this pandemic and what you will do to limit this in the future. In addition, we would like to know why veterans are being forced to travel so far from their homes, in contradiction of the MISSION Act. Lastly, we would like to receive clarification on why the VA has reportedly marked veterans that object to these great distances

as “no shows” to their appointments and would like to know how the VA will ensure our veterans’ specific needs are being met appropriately.

Sincerely,



Katherine Clark
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Elizabeth Warren
UNITED STATES SENATOR

Edward J. Markey
UNITED STATES SENATOR

Richard E. Neal
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James P. McGovern
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