

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

May 7, 2024

The Honorable Kyrsten Sinema
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on Military
Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related
Agencies
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Military
Construction, Veterans Affairs, and
Related Agencies
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Sinema and Ranking Member Boozman:

We appreciate the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies (MILCONVA) appropriations subcommittee's continued commitment to our nation's veterans and their health. As you deliberate the Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you include the following report language:

“Improving Staffing and Accountability in the Veterans Health Administration – The Committees are concerned about the persistent employee vacancies within the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Administration (VHA), the imminent plans to cut 10,000 full-time jobs from the agency, and the alarming reports that budget shortfalls drive these employee vacancies and hiring freezes. The committees also note the recent Government Accountability Office and VA Office of Inspector General reports highlighting mismanagement in the background investigation process when hiring these employees, with one in eight employees hired by VHA either not receiving a background check or not receiving one in a timely manner. Therefore, the Committees direct VHA to submit a report to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress no later than 180 days after enactment of this Act on how maintaining staffing levels from Q4 FY 2023 will support reductions in wait times, increased access, and record overall enrollment in health care. This should include a list of where the Department plans to implement the elimination of approximately 10,000 full-time roles delineated by facility, office, and position. The Committees also direct VHA to submit a report on the number of VHA employees who are onsite and have not yet completed the background check process separated by those who have been onsite for more or less than 180 days and the number of employees who are currently completing dual responsibilities in lieu of existing staff shortages.”

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has significant challenges hiring for vacant roles and communicating with staff regarding those vacancies. In 2023, the VA listed over 60,000 employment vacancies across the country. In the past four years, 60 percent of VA employees reported losing critical resources needed to serve veterans, 90 percent reported the need for more

frontline staff to continue operations, 64 percent said there were vacant positions for which no recruitment was taking place; one facility reported having 48 physician vacancies.¹ The Government Accountability Office and Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General highlight that the VA has not provided solutions to address the occupational shortfalls, delays, and mismanagement related to completing employee background checks.

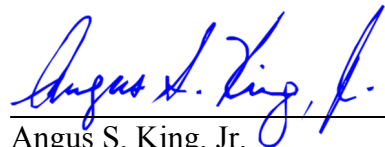
Moreover, the VA recently announced its intent to eliminate approximately 10,000 full-time roles across the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) due to budget shortfalls, with little detail regarding which states would be affected by these changes.² Various reports have also revealed that hiring freezes occur across hospitals and clinics nationwide. Inconsistent staffing patterns put veterans' healthcare quality and accessibility at risk and redirect employees' attention from their defined job responsibilities to compensate for employment shortages.³

Veterans across the country deserve better care and should not be subject to continuous appointment delays or lower-quality care due to these administrative issues. The committee's role in addressing these challenges is crucial. Thank you for considering this important request and for your continued support in ensuring the VA provides the quality care veterans deserve.

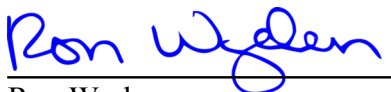
Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator

¹ “New VA Employee Survey Reveals Severe Understaffing at VA Facilities.” *AFGE*, 29 Aug. 2022, www.afge.org/article/new-va-employee-survey-reveals-severe-understaffing-at-va-facilities/.

² III, Leo Shane. “VA Plans to Trim 10,000 Jobs This Year, Mostly from Medical Sites.” *Military Times*, Military Times, 12 Mar. 2024, [www.militarytimes.com/veterans/2024/03/12/va-plans-to-trim-10000-jobs-this-year-mostly-from-medical-sites/#:~:text=U.S.%20Department%20of%20Veterans%20Affairs,workforce%2C%20budget%20planners%20said%20Monday](http://www.militarytimes.com/veterans/2024/03/12/va-plans-to-trim-10000-jobs-this-year-mostly-from-medical-sites/#:~:text=U.S.%20Department%20of%20Veterans%20Affairs,workforce%2C%20budget%20planners%20said%20Monday.).

³ Katz, Eric. “VA Is Putting Veterans at Risk by Improperly Screening Employees, Watchdogs Warn.” *Government Executive*, Government Executive, 6 Dec. 2023, www.govexec.com/workforce/2023/12/va-putting-veterans-risk-improperly-screening-employees-watchdogs-warn/392526/.



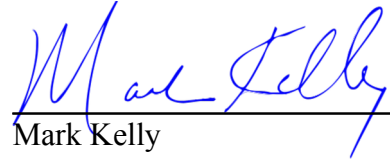
Tina Smith
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



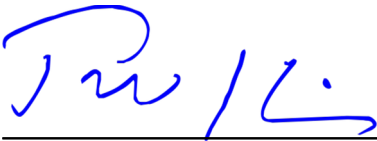
Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



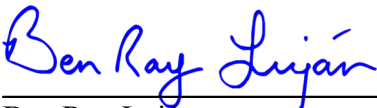
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley

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United States Senator

Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator