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## United States Senate

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February 12, 2016

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald  
Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

I write to urge you to address significant problems with the non-VA claims processing system, and to work with Third Party Administrators (TPAs) to improve implementation of the Choice Program in Colorado. My office has received concerning reports from veterans and private health care providers of delays in reimbursements for non-VA providers. My staff has also heard concerns regarding the manner in which TPAs have administered the Choice Card program. I ask that you take swift action to address these issues in order to ensure veterans across Colorado are receiving the timely and quality care they deserve.

I am troubled to hear reports that private health care providers who participate in the Choice program are encountering reimbursement delays. Congress has required the VA to ensure prompt payment to non-VA health care providers in the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. Such delays both create an administrative burden on private health care providers and discourage them from providing services to veterans. Provider participation in non-VA care programs is critical to ensuring veterans have access to timely, quality care. Based on the reports I have received, I am concerned that the current system and requirements for medical documentation submission is overly burdensome and may be inhibiting timely claims processing. As such, I ask that you take steps to review and improve the claims processing system to ensure prompt payment to providers in Colorado.

I am particularly concerned with these implementation challenges because the burden of error falls mostly on the veteran. The Choice Card Program was created to reduce wait times for veterans and provide timely access to care. In Colorado, it is clear that gaps remain in understanding the Choice Program and related business processes among Veterans Health Administration staff, veterans, and private health care providers alike. By some accounts, veterans are forced to spend over thirty minutes on the phone with the Choice Card program, using valuable minutes on pre-paid cell phones. Additionally, administrators are providing veterans and providers inconsistent information regarding scheduling appointments, payment, and eligibility. Veterans are rightfully frustrated by barriers to accessing much-needed non-VA services and are concerned about errors that may lead to the degradation of care. I urge you to exercise your oversight role to ensure the TPAs that the VA has contracted to administer the

Choice Card program are implementing the program in a manner that protects the health of our veterans.

I understand the VA is currently working to streamline and improve the delivery of non-VA care to veterans. The successful implementation of the current Choice program, which services many veterans living in Colorado's rural and highly rural communities, is critical to that effort. I urge you to engage with the TPAs to accelerate accurate payments to private health care providers to ensure all eligible veterans are provided access to quality non-VA care in a consistent manner. Thank you for the work you do for our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael F. Bennet". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "M" and "B".

Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator