

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 12, 2018

U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson
Chairman
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
418 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Isakson,

As members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, we respectfully request an oversight hearing regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) proposed regulations for health care access standards and urgent care. Transparency and accountability are essential throughout implementation of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act (VA MISSION Act). Given the far-reaching changes these proposed regulations will have on VA health care, it is critical that the Committee establish oversight early on, rather than after these regulations have taken effect.

VA's failure to consult with Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and Congress during development of these regulations is disconcerting. Despite close collaboration between VA and this Committee throughout MISSION Act negotiations, VA chose to work behind closed doors as they developed these regulations, which they shared with lawmakers and the veteran community through a press release. This raises significant questions and concerns that must be addressed in a public, transparent manner. We envision this hearing as an opportunity to learn more from not only VA officials, but also from VSOs who were largely shut out of the decision making process.

VA's proposal simply does not provide adequate information to determine how these proposed regulations will affect veterans seeking care at VA health facilities. Key details such as projections for cost and utilization are absent from VA's proposal, which makes it impossible to determine whether these changes are realistic. In advance of the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations cycle, VA must provide Congress with a clear justification for these proposed regulations and a thorough analysis of the level of funding that will be necessary to execute these changes. The absence of a clear plan to cover the cost of expanding access to private care is cause for concern, particularly given VA's history of poor financial management.

A hearing will shed light as to how these proposed regulations will affect VA facilities and inform legislative and funding priorities in the 116th Congress. We hope to gain an understanding of VA's rationale for the new wait and drive time standards, particularly in regards to how these standards will shape the use of VA health care facilities. It is disappointing that VA has not provided a clear plan for balancing resources and funding between VA health care and community care. Holding a hearing is an important initial step to improving collaboration and ensuring VA continues to provide specialized, quality care to veterans.

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It is our understanding that the House Veterans' Affairs Committee is planning to hold a hearing to review these regulations. We request that you schedule either a bicameral or Senate Veterans Affairs' Committee hearing as soon as possible and look forward to working together to ensure VA is delivering the highest quality care to veterans. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



SHERROD BROWN
United States Senate



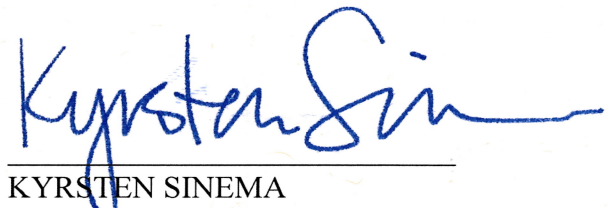
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