



July 15, 2015

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
825A Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Miller
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
336 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Corrine Brown
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
333 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Isakson, Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Blumenthal and Ranking Member Brown:

As partner organizations in the Independent Budget, we write to express our support for legislation the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has transmitted to the Committees, which would authorize VA to use \$3 billion from the Veterans Choice Fund to address the higher than expected demand for care in the community and Hepatitis C treatment.

On July 13, 2015, VA informed Congress that it is “unable to keep pace with the extraordinary demands” on its health care system and warned that without additional resources, it could be required to shut down some hospital operations in August 2015. VA accredits the unprecedented demand to its efforts to improve access, which has incentivized more veterans to seek VA health care. VA’s data shows that overall demand on the VA health care system has increased by more than 10 percent over the past year, while its budget has only increased by 2.8 percent.

Last year we released The Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 Independent Budget, which recommended approximately \$61.1 billion for total medical care for VA in FY 2015. However, in January 2014, Congress only appropriated approximately \$58.9 billion for all VA medical care services. We proclaimed then that VA was being placed in a precarious position that could leave it woefully short in providing health care services.

Some members of the committees attribute such shortfall to VA inefficiency, waste and mismanagement, and fear that authorizing VA to transfer resources from the \$10 billion Veterans Choice Fund will lead to the demise of the Veterans Choice Program, which was created to improve access to care in the community when VA health care is not readily available. However, unless VA’s budget shortfalls are addressed, the Veterans Choice Program will not be given the opportunity to operate as intended and veterans will be forced to wait longer for private sector health care or be denied veteran-specific health care that cannot be found in the private sector.

America will not stand for her veterans being denied the health care they have earned and deserve. Congress must swiftly pass VA’s proposed legislation to provide VA the additional FY 2015 funding

needed to meet demand on the system. In addition, Congress and the Administration must still reach a final funding solution to complete the Denver VA replacement medical center, a project whose completion we fully support, further increasing the need to boost funding.

On behalf of the millions of veterans who make up our memberships, we appreciate your consideration of our concerns regarding the funding levels needed to care of our Nation's veterans.

Sincerely,



Garry J. Augustine
Executive Director
Disabled American Veterans



Homer S. Townsend, Jr.
Executive Director
Paralyzed Veterans of America



Robert E. Wallace
Executive Director
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States