

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2022

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write today to ask the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to expand upon their recent recommendations to the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR). According to the published timeline mandated under the VA MISSION Act of 2018, the AIR Commission was supposed to begin holding public hearings on your recommendations for an overhaul of the existing 171 hospitals and 1,112 outpatient clinics around the United States in February 2022. Interestingly, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee only recently received names to begin the nomination process, meaning there is not yet a commission to even review your recommendations. Your report for restructuring includes an estimated \$2 trillion infrastructure overhaul and recommends closing 17 medical centers in 12 states without clear guidelines on direct replacements. The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) even recently released a report stating that incomplete data may hinder confidence in any proposals for VA facility realignment forwarded to the commission¹. We are concerned that this report recommends many actions that could harm rather than enhance veteran's access to care.

Most alarmingly, your recommendations include closing the VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Alexandria, Louisiana, and a complete rebuild of the Shreveport VAMC. According to your report, the justification for the closure of the Alexandria VAMC is based on calculations that the enrolled veteran population across Central Louisiana (CenLa) will decrease from 39,600 to 39,312 in 2029, a difference of only 288 enrollees over 10 years. The report also stated that when the Alexandria VAMC closes, there will be relocation of outpatient and community living center services to a new site and relocation of inpatient medicine, mental health, and outpatient surgery to community providers.

As this report is considered by Congress and others, we urge you to reconsider the closure of the Alexandria VAMC. This facility is critical for veterans across Louisiana and the detrimental effects of its closure would be immeasurable. This vague recommendation leaves many

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104604.pdf>

questions for veterans living in CenLa who earned and rely on these services. Louisiana veterans deserve clear-cut answers explaining how any changes will affect their access to life saving care.

Please provide the following information:

1. What were the VA's assessment criteria for closing and rebuilding these facilities?
2. Does the VA have specific offsets to finance this \$2 trillion infrastructure overhaul? If so, what are they?
3. Can you provide a comprehensive explanation of how the VA will maintain care for veterans dependent on the Alexandria VAMC and Shreveport VAMC during and after the closure and reconstruction? Can you ensure that our veterans will maintain access to adequate care should this restructuring take place?
4. Can you define and provide examples of what "relocation to a new site or community provider" means in the context of Alexandria veterans?
5. Do you have a plan in place for relocating Alexandria VAMC staff or will they be displaced through these efforts?
6. Is there any plan to mitigate the potential healthcare workforce shortage should the VA choose to close this valuable teaching hospital?
7. Why did you release your recommendations before the AIR Commission was confirmed by the Senate? We need to be assured that our veterans and communities have a chance to voice their concerns in public hearings on the infrastructure overhaul before any and all changes are made.

Given the importance of this topic to veterans, please provide your response no later than Friday, April 15, 2022.

Sincerely,



John Kennedy
United States Senator



Julia Letlow
Member of Congress