

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 7, 2019

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

We write to bring to your attention an urgent matter of grave importance for the veterans of Maine.

Over the course of the last several months, we have heard from Maine community hospitals and health care providers about their growing concerns that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has not been diligent or timely with the payments it owes providers for the community care services they deliver to eligible veterans. The Maine Hospital Association (MHA), which represents critical access hospitals across the state, reports that fifteen of its member hospitals currently have millions of dollars of delinquent payments in their claims backlog. Of these accounts, about thirty percent are more than 180 days old. Likewise, a number of other qualified providers from across the state of Maine have contacted our offices to report similar issues with the VA that have resulted in aging accounts and significant financial duress.

The VA's community care options have helped Maine veterans in rural parts of the state receive care in their local communities instead of traveling long distances to the Togus VA Medical Center in Augusta. We expect that the Veterans Community Care Program, as authorized by the VA Mission Act of 2018, will build on the Veterans Choice Program to improve timeliness and accessibility for veterans who may live far from VA facilities; we will continue to closely track its implementation to ensure its success.

Timely community care, however, is contingent upon broad participation by community providers and a good faith relationship between those providers and the VA. We are aware of community care providers who may be forced to suspend their service with the VA or have already done so due to the administrative and financial challenges of serving veterans referred by the VA. Due to such challenges, Maine veterans are at risk of losing access to care close to their homes.

We respectfully request that the VA quickly pay all valid and eligible claims, provide an explanation for delayed payments, and outline its reporting process on paid claims.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Community care providers in Maine offer critical services for our veterans, and they are proud to help care for those who have served. We urge the VA to work closely with these providers to address this payment issue and work to strengthen these relationships so our veterans can continue to receive the accessible, high-quality care they deserve.

Sincerely,



SUSAN M. COLLINS  
United States Senator



ANGUS S. KING, JR.  
United States Senator



CHELLIE PINGREE  
Member of Congress



JARED GOLDEN  
Member of Congress