

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 27, 2023

Secretary Denis McDonough
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20571

Dear Secretary McDonough,

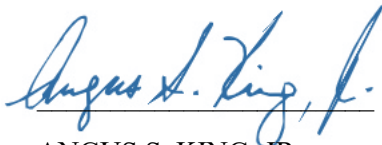
On average, seventeen U.S. veterans die by suicide every day. A rate that is 57% greater than that of their civilian counterparts. In the state of Maine, roughly 75% of these deaths of despair are self-inflicted using a firearm. During your recent visit to Maine, we discussed how essential safe gun storage can be to a veteran in crisis. In addition, you learned about some of the current work being done by the VA in Maine to provide veterans with gun safes, lockboxes, and locks as part of the Governor's Challenge. Gun safes were particularly sought after by veterans.

That is why the Veterans Benefits Administration should set aside funding for Regional Offices to buy and give away gun safes and gun lockboxes to provide safe storage options for veterans. A number of studies have found that gun storage, such as gun locks, lockboxes, and safes can help prevent suicide. These devices create a moment of pause for veterans who are contemplating harm; putting time and space between a person in crisis and their firearm can save a life.

As part of Maine's Governor's Challenge, the VA, the Maine Bureau of Veteran Services, and partner organizations are providing information on gun storage and working with gun shops and ranges to allow veterans to safely store their guns in times of crisis. These groups have been distributing gun locks and gun safes since 2020. The demand for these products is clear. To that end, there have been over 2,450 requests for gun locks. However, due to a lack of resources, less than 10 gun lockboxes or safes have been distributed. We can and must do better.

As a result, I believe that it is important for the VA to set aside specific funds to distribute gun locks, lockboxes, and safes to veterans in need. We need innovative approaches to support veteran suicide prevention efforts, and providing funding to the safe storage of guns would be incredibly impactful in helping reduce the high rate of veteran suicide.

Sincerely,



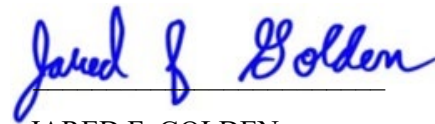
ANGUS S. KING, JR.

United States Senator



CHELLIE M. PINGREE

United States Representative



JARED F. GOLDEN

United States Representative