

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 8, 2019

Dr. Joan McInerney
Network Director, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VISN 2 VA New York/New Jersey VA Health Care Network
130 W. Kingsbridge Road
Building 16
Bronx, NY 10468

Dear Dr. McInerney,

We are writing on behalf of our constituents and veterans who are frustrated and suffer needlessly because of the long wait times, low number of providers, and numerous barriers to care at the Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) located in Brick Township, New Jersey. We also hear regularly from exasperated veterans in the region about the protracted timeline for the new facility and share their desire to provide the highest quality of care as quickly as possible.

As you know, the New Jersey Veterans Health Care System is responsible for providing vital care to the nearly 355,000 veterans that reside in New Jersey. Ocean County has the largest veteran population of the 21 counties in the state and one of the oldest veteran populations per capita in the entire country. This puts a large demand on the Brick CBOC, which was originally expected to serve roughly 5,000 veterans when it was built in 1991. Twenty-eight years later, that same space and structure now serves more than 10,000 active patients from the community of nearly 90,000 veterans living in Monmouth, Ocean, and Burlington Counties.

With the passage of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014, the promise of a new facility became real to thousands of veterans we represent. That legislation authorized a new CBOC in Ocean County through a major medical facility lease not to exceed \$7.28 million. The lease procurement process began in Spring 2015, but in an attempt to increase qualified competition the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) resolicited the project in April 2018. While we understand the VA's reasons to restart the process, we believe the broad timeline we were provided—site selection by first or second quarter of FY2020—can and should be more specific and meticulously adhered to.

Finally, veterans utilizing the CBOC experience numerous barriers to care, including unacceptably long wait times, too few providers, even fewer options for transportation, difficulty finding parking nearby and a lack of automatic doors at each entrance – preventing wheelchair bound or disabled veterans from opening the door to the physical therapy clinic without assistance. These issues have only added to the growing frustration of veterans within our community.

We have raised these concerns directly with you and other VA officials repeatedly over the last several months during multiple visits to the facility and in one-on-one meetings with you and members of VA leadership. Therefore, in order to deliver on the promise of better, more timely service for our veterans and ensure our veteran community is properly honored through the delivery of VA excellence, we respectfully request complete written responses to the following questions:

1. What is the current timeline for the new CBOC in Ocean County, NJ?
2. How many providers are needed to be fully staffed and how many are currently available at the Brick CBOC? Please include a specific breakdown of the different types of providers (including MDs, NPs, RNs, LPNs, etc.).
 - a. Do you consider the Brick CBOC to be fully staffed? If not, what is your plan and timeline to become fully staffed?
 - b. What are the steps that you are taking to ensure that the Brick CBOC remains fully staffed?
 - c. Have you considered incentives to retain providers at the Brick CBOC?
 - d. What performance measures do you utilize to evaluate provider needs? Do you track patient wait times as a measure of capacity and performance? If not, why? And what alternative performance metrics does the VA use to measure patient satisfaction?
 - e. How many providers of women's healthcare, including gynecologists, do you plan to have at the Brick CBOC?
3. Has an evaluation or study of the dire and years-long parking and transportation problems at the Brick CBOC been conducted? If not, why?
 - a. What immediate steps can be taken to alleviate the parking shortage? Have steps been made to have staff park off-site as was previously suggested?
 - b. Has the VA considered expanding existing transportation pilot programs to the Brick CBOC, such as the one being carried out in South Carolina, Indiana and Oklahoma with 95% veteran satisfaction and significant cost savings? If so, what is the timeline for implementation? And if not, why?

In addition, we ask that we are notified of any changes that occur that might impact the timeline of the new CBOC announcement. We also request that you consider providing in-person quarterly updates to the veteran community leaders in the local area, beginning at the time of the new CBOC announcement.

Thank you in advance for your time and attention to these important concerns. We stand ready to work with you and your team to ensure that our New Jersey veterans receive the benefits they deserve from an eternally grateful nation. Additionally, we respectfully request a response by December 8th, 2019. Please do not hesitate to contact us directly to discuss the issue further at any time.

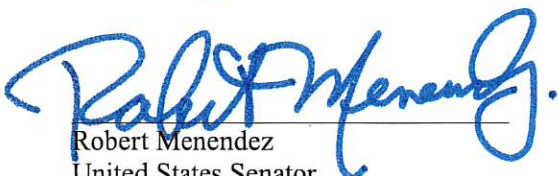
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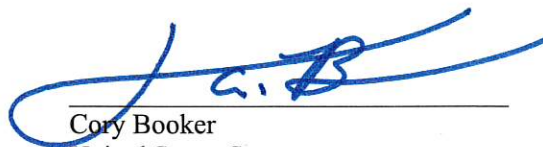
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