

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 14, 2026

The Honorable Douglas A. Collins  
Secretary  
US Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins:

We write with considerable concern over recent steps taken by your Department that further impact the Veterans Affairs (VA) workforce at health facilities across the country. Late last year you announced that the Department would eliminate tens of thousands of vacant positions nationwide, thereby ending the process of filling many of those roles that would have directly interfaced with and provided care to veterans.

Virginia has been hit particularly hard by this decision. According to data that we have seen, through January of this year, more than 1,700 vacancies have been taken off the books across Virginia. This has meant more than 700 vacancies eliminated at the Hampton VAMC, more than 300 vacancies eliminated at the Richmond VAMC, more than 200 vacancies eliminated at the Salem VAMC, and several hundred more eliminated at community clinics and other facilities across the Commonwealth.

These roles span the workforce – positions including social workers, technicians, chaplains, and security officers. Adding to the concern, is that based on a review of the data, more than half of the eliminated vacancies in Virginia appear to have been for roles with a direct clinical nexus to patients – physicians, nurses, specialists, therapists, pharmacists, among others. No matter the role – and as we have argued in response to your Department’s assertion that earlier hiring freezes were not impacting patient care – the workforce at VA facilities is meant to function as a team; dramatic cuts to any position therefore necessitates that the remaining personnel shoulder increasingly more responsibility.

For many years, the VA has sought to address workforce challenges across the country, including challenges recruiting and retaining personnel, and challenges matching compensation to other employment alternatives for certain positions. This is why under the PACT Act, Congress provided VA with additional authorities and incentives to more aggressively recruit personnel. Under your leadership, the VA should be doing everything possible to build out and invest in the Department’s workforce. Instead, we’ve seen hiring freezes, staffing caps, the shedding of tens of thousands of personnel last year, rhetoric by administration officials demonizing federal employees, and *now* this process to eliminate vacant roles nationwide thereby ending the recruitment process for these positions.

We have heard from VA personnel how all of these factors have made it increasingly hard for them to do their jobs – which is to provide the care and benefits that our nation’s veterans have earned through their service. We’re concerned by the appearance that these decisions are being made without due consideration to their clinical impact, and we have serious questions about the process by which these vacancy eliminations were decided.

To that end, we request answers to the following questions no later than June 1. We note that the data and documentation below should all be information that your Department has readily available:

1. Data that we have seen and have represented in this letter is data through January 2026. Please provide us with current data related to vacancies eliminated from facilities in Virginia.
2. A Department spokesperson has said that the VA directed “facility leaders to keep all of the positions they need and eliminate any unfilled positions that they don’t need.”
  - a. Please provide a copy of the guidance that was communicated to facility and regional leadership for identifying vacancies.
  - b. Were any facilities provided a quota or target of any kind – whether number of positions, a percentage of workforce, or otherwise – for reduction of vacancies that they should achieve?
  - c. What was the criteria by which facility leaders were directed to identify positions “that they don’t need”? Was this determination based on current conditions, or future projections?
  - d. Did Department personnel involved in this process receive any concern, pushback, or other feedback that was counter to the vacancy cuts – particularly related to clinical impact, overall workforce health, or personnel morale – from any facility- or VISN-level personnel? What was the process for addressing that information?
  - e. Did facility leaders concur with the final determinations regarding vacancy cuts?
3. Of the eliminated vacancies in Virginia, how many were occupied for any period during 2025 and/or 2026?
4. For any of the vacant positions that have been eliminated, had an employment offer been made to any individual(s) at the time of the vacancy’s elimination?
5. Section 146 of the *Senator Elizabeth Dole 21<sup>st</sup> Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act* (P.L.118-210) outlines direction to the VA to “develop, validate, and implement a staffing model...that includes appropriate target staffing levels nationally, regionally, and locally to ensure timely access to care and effectively oversee the provision of care by the Department, whether at a facility of the Department or through a non-Department provider”.
  - a. Please provide the staffing models that relate to the Hampton VAMC, the Richmond VAMC, the Salem VAMC, as well as other facilities in Virginia for which staffing models exist.

- b. Did VA personnel involved in these vacancy cuts – including any VISN and facility leadership – consult these staffing models in making determinations related to vacancy elimination?
6. If, either presently or in the future, a determination is made that any of these eliminated vacant positions need to be re-created and hired for, what is that process?
7. To the extent that any positions were cut because of an inability to attract candidates, what does the Department plan to do differently to fill those positions either now or in the future?
8. For each VA facility in Virginia, please provide the current number of personnel, the number of openings that the facility is presently hiring for, and the target or ‘full-capacity’ number of personnel for that facility.
9. What data does the VA collect at the facility-level, examining how workforce changes – including personnel or vacancy reductions – impact the current facility staff?
10. How do these vacancy eliminations reconcile with the Department’s own analysis from recent years, which showed that projected veteran population growth in the Commonwealth of Virginia could support multiple new facilities, beyond even those that are open presently?

We appreciate your attention to this matter, as well as to our continued engagement with the Department on this topic going forward.

Sincerely,



MARK R. WARNER  
United States Senator



TIM KAINE  
United States Senator