

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 5, 2022

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Chairman
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Heinrich and Ranking Member Boozman,

As you begin the process of developing spending priorities for the Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bills, we respectfully request robust funding for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs that serve rural veterans.

According to the VA, there are 4.7 million veterans residing in rural areas across the United States, and 2.7 million are enrolled in the VA health care system. These veterans face unique challenges accessing the quality, timely VA services they earned through their service to our nation.

We therefore request that the VA's Office of Rural Health (ORH) be funded at \$327 million in FY23, a \$20 million increase over the president's budget request and consistent with last year's enacted funding level. ORH funding supports national programs, special projects, and research initiatives aimed at better serving rural veterans including:

- Clinical Resource Hubs, which utilize both in-person and telehealth solutions to increase rural veteran access to primary, mental health, and specialty care;
- Several need-specific telehealth programs, including rehabilitation, care for rural veterans with HIV, and web-based therapy for military sexual trauma;
- Five Veterans Rural Health Resources Centers, which facilitate research, innovation, and technical assistance in support of rural veterans; and
- Rural Consultants at each of the nation's 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) to support each VISN in addressing rural veteran-specific needs and issues.

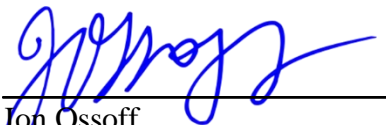
Transportation also remains a key barrier to access for rural veterans. According to an ORH assessment, transportation is the top challenge facing rural veterans, who tend to live in areas with fewer health care facilities and providers, and face unique socioeconomic challenges.

According to the VA, 55% of VA-enrolled rural veterans are 65 or older and 44% of enrolled rural veterans earn an annual income of less than \$35,000.

We therefore request robust funding to expand and improve transportation access to and from facilities that serve rural veterans. This includes funding for: The Veterans Transportation Service, which provides several transportation options to improve veteran access to services, often in partnership with veteran service organizations and local entities; the Highly Rural Transportation Grants (HRTG) program, which aids veterans in areas with fewer than seven people per square mile; and the Beneficiary Travel program, which provides essential reimbursement for mileage and travel expenses. Funding should also be sufficient to enable the VA and ORH to implement innovative transportation pilot programs to improve rural veteran access to VA services.

Congress must ensure the VA has the resources necessary to reach all of our veterans, no matter where they live. Our rural veterans have earned the right to quality, timely, and accessible care. Thank you for your consideration of this request.


Sincerely,



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



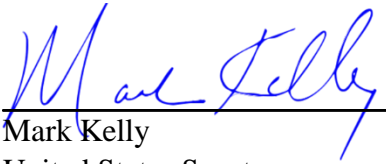
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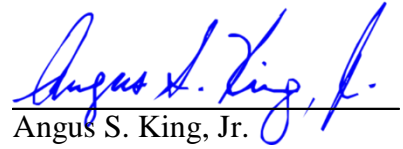
Jon Tester
United States Senator



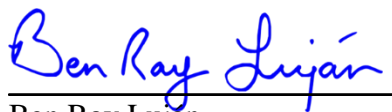
Tom Cotton
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
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Chair, Subcommittee on
Strategic Forces



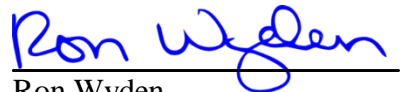
Ben Ray Lujan
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Raphael G. Warnock
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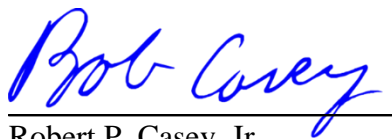
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



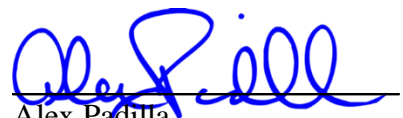
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