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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 29, 2016

The Honorable Dr. David J. Shulkin
Under Secretary of Health
Department of Veterans Affairs
801 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington DC, 20420

Dear Dr. Shulkin:

As you know, rural veterans rely on the VA to provide high quality healthcare in greater numbers than other veterans, making up 25% of the veteran population but 33% of the total population enrolled in the VA healthcare system. As a group, rural veterans have a unique set of issues that must be addressed if we are to keep our promise to those who have sacrificed in order to keep our country safe. I am a strong supporter of the VA's efforts to expand healthcare opportunities for rural veterans, however I know more work remains.

Missouri is home to almost 200,000 rural veterans, and I know you share my commitment to ensuring these veterans receive the best healthcare our country can offer. For this reason, I am forwarding you a petition signed by over 5,700 constituents respectfully requesting the services at the Salem, Missouri Veterans Clinic, the only VA facility in Missouri not regularly open five days a week, be expanded from 3 days per month to 5 days a week. The American Legion Post sponsoring the petition has said that 28% of the petition's signers, or approximately 1,600 people, are veterans.

I understand the Veteran's Health Administration (VHA) uses the Health System Planning Application to examine a number of factors including veteran population, veteran enrollee population, and utilization trends over a twenty-year planning period when making decisions about healthcare delivery in communities. Given the significant interest expressed by veterans living near the Salem Clinic, I would like to know how the VHA weights enrollee rates in underserved areas against total veteran population. I am concerned that veterans who live near VA facilities with limited operating hours may avoid enrolling into the system all together if they don't have regular access to their healthcare provider.

I have appreciated your partnership as we work to improve the services available to veterans. Please feel free to contact Nick Rawls on my staff at Nick_Rawls@mccaskill.senate.gov or at (202) 224-6154 with any questions.

Respectfully,



Claire McCaskill
United States Senator

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