

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 28, 2024

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen:

As we strive to enhance and expand the resources available to the over 18 million veterans residing in the United States,¹ we urge you to follow the recent actions of the House Veterans Affairs Committee in passing a resolution approving the 10 major U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical leases that were listed in the President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2024. These leases cover facilities for research, community living centers, outpatient clinics, and hospitals in regions in South Carolina, Texas, Pennsylvania, Florida, and our respective home states of Delaware and New Jersey.

The President's Budget request for these medical leases outlines a necessity to modernize and expand the capacity of facilities crucial to the needs of veterans in the various requested regions. These facilities provide a wide range of services, reduce the workload for the larger VA medical centers they are connected to, and increase access to health and well-being services for veterans, especially when located in rural areas that rely primarily on the VA for health care.² Additionally, as most VA facilities are more than 50 years old, or five times older than the average building for non-profit hospitals,³ leasing projects like these can ensure the VA has the modern facilities needed to continue providing the high-quality health care that veterans expect and deserve.

Two major medical leases detailed in the President's Budget were for hospital leases in Sussex County, Delaware and Southern New Jersey to significantly expand high-quality care in these mostly rural locations that are experiencing growth in the veteran population.

These hospital leases in Sussex County and Southern New Jersey would allow for a decompression of the larger Wilmington Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in Wilmington, Delaware, and enhance inpatient and outpatient services by closing space gaps identified in the Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) process. The new leases would also expand the current primary care spaces, thus improving operational efficiencies, and enhancing the overall Veteran experience. The leases represent right-sized, state-of-the-art, energy-efficient health care facilities that would provide primary care, mental health, specialty care, inpatient medicine, and ancillary services to veterans. Further, Sussex County, Delaware and Southern New Jersey are highly rural areas, and the facilities would serve thousands of veterans across the Delmarva Peninsula and New Jersey.

¹ Pew Research Center. (2023). The Changing Face of America's Veteran Population. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/08/the-changing-face-of-americas-veteran-population/>

² Rural Health Information Hub. (2023). Rural Veterans and Access to Healthcare. Retrieved from <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/returning-soldier-and-veteran-health>

³ Rand. (2021). Infrastructure Investments for Veterans. Retrieved from <https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/05/infrastructure-investment-for-veterans.html>

As the Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure has jurisdiction over the General Services Administration (GSA), which the VA needs to delegate leasing authority to solicit, award, and obligate funding for these leases, the Committee is pivotal to the success of this effort to expand resources to veterans across the United States, including our districts.

We have an obligation to support the brave servicemembers who sacrificed for our country, and their families. We will continue to fight to protect veterans and improve access for this population to life-saving research, community living, and health care.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Blunt Rochester". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

LISA BLUNT ROCHESTER
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jefferson Van Drew". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JEFFERSON VAN DREW
Member of Congress