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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-1313

March 30, 2015

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE  
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald  
Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue Northwest  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald,

We are encouraged by the recent Department of Veterans Affairs decision to clarify the 40-mile distance rule established in H.R. 3230, Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act. Changing this rule to rely on driving distance rather than an "as the crow flies" measure is aligned with Congress' original legislative intent and will ensure that more veterans have access to the choice program. However, as we have talked with veterans around our districts there is still confusion surrounding eligibility for the choice program, particularly with regard to veterans who are seeking care for a specific medical need that may not be offered at a VA facility within a 40 mile driving distance of that veteran.

As members of Congress and supporters of the choice program it was our intent that the program be used to reduce the burden on veterans dealing with these exact types of situations. The purpose of the choice program is to give veterans more options and fewer headaches when seeking medical care. We believe a veteran who needs to see a specialist not available at a nearby VA facility is a clear example of someone who should receive eligibility for the choice program. Although we understand that the choice program is a temporary three year pilot program, we believe that allowing veterans dealing with this burden eligibility into the program will result in better planning for future VA reforms.

Therefore, as Secretary of Veterans Affairs, we strongly encourage you to utilize the authority provided to you through law to interpret the provisions of the choice program in a way to maximize the amount of veterans it seeks to help. We are all united in the goal of ensuring every veteran receives the care they have earned. As your department continues to implement and finalize the choice program, we stand ready to assist to ensure veterans receive the care and attention they so rightfully deserve. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Rodney Davis  
Member of Congress



Mike Bost  
Member of Congress