

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 4, 2015

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

Dear Secretary McDonald:

We write with continued concerns about health care availability for Louisiana veterans. While we understand implementation of Public Law 113-146, the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA) is currently on schedule, we have serious apprehensions about the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Interim Final Rule entitled "Expanded Access to Non-VA Care through the Veterans Choice Program," issued on November 5, 2014.

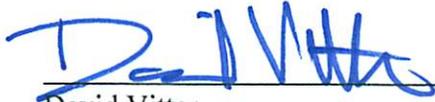
Specifically, provisions of the rule regarding distance eligibility for the Veterans Choice Card will cause many veterans, particularly in Louisiana, to go without desperately needed care. Pursuant to the rule, a veteran residing within 40 miles of a VA medical facility is automatically precluded from using the card, even if the aforementioned facility does not provide the type of care necessary for the veteran's treatment. When describing how the 40-mile provision will be applied, VA explicitly states:

"For example, if a veteran needs cardiac care and lives 10 miles from a VA community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC) that only offers primary care and mental health care, but 50 miles from a VA medical facility that offers cardiac care, the veteran would not be eligible based on his or her proximity to the CBOC. This interpretation is consistent with the plain language of the Act, which refers only to 'the medical facility of the Department that is closest to the residence of the veteran,' without allowing VA to consider whether the facility can actually provide the care needed by the veteran."

We would like to remind you of VA's existing legal authority to allow veterans to receive non-VA care in instances where an unreasonable burden is placed on the veteran to commute to an appropriately staffed VA medical facility, when a needed clinical service is not offered by the VA or when delay of treatment may be life-threatening. VACAA does not encroach on this existing authority, and it is misleading to imply Congress is limiting the VA's ability to exercise it. We strongly urge VA to use this authority to ensure veterans have access to the specific types of care they require without delay.

The debt of gratitude owed to our nation's veterans cannot be overstated, and we look forward to working with you to provide them the highest level of care and respect possible. Thank you for your continued efforts to improve VA operations in Louisiana and throughout the nation. We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



David Vitter
United States Senator



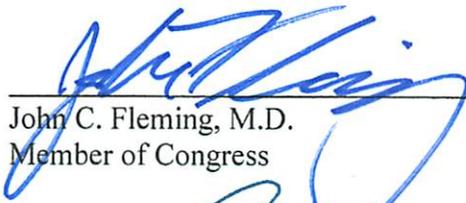
Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



Charles W. Boustany, Jr., M.D.
Member of Congress



Steve Scalise
Member of Congress



John C. Fleming, M.D.
Member of Congress



Cedric L. Richmond
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Ralph Abraham, M.D.
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Garret Graves
Member of Congress