

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 14, 2022

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

We write today to express our deep concerns with some of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recommendations for the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission (AIR Commission) published on March 14, 2022, specifically, to close the Central Western Massachusetts Veterans Affairs Medical Center (CWM VAMC) located in Leeds, Massachusetts. We are very concerned that this recommendation could jeopardize veterans' access to high quality, specialized care that the veterans living in Central and Western Massachusetts deserve.

Veterans, CWM VAMC staff, VSO representatives, local officials and community members have expressed serious concerns about the impact of this closure. Of particular concern is that many veterans would now need to travel at least two-hours round trip to receive care at VA medical centers in West Haven, Connecticut; Eastern Massachusetts; or Albany, New York. Due to health status, advanced age, or lack of public transportation, far too many of the approximately 21,000 veterans who currently receive care at CWM VAMC would be unduly burdened.

Another area of significant concern is reduced access to veteran-focused mental health services. CWM VAMC currently provides inpatient mental health services, including the Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (RRTP) for veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress, as well as offer beds for veterans struggling with substance use disorder in a region that is already unable to meet the demand. Additionally, removing the 28 bed Community Living Center (CLC) would put additional strain on veterans requiring nursing home level care. We worry that moving these services to locations in Connecticut or Eastern Massachusetts would result in veterans either not getting the care they need or putting incredible strain on their families and loved ones.

Furthermore, we are concerned that the process used to make CWM VAMC's closure recommendation doesn't accurately reflect the medical center's current standing or future potential because it largely relied on old data from FY2015 through FY2018. For example, since that time there has been \$108,400,000 in completed or ongoing renovations and modernization projects at the facility. Additionally, nearly \$93,000,000 in future upgrades are planned for the coming years. We have attached a breakdown of these projects for your review. The VA has already made significant investments to the facility and closure would be a waste of those improvements.

Based on the aforementioned concerns, we have serious concerns that closing the CWM VAMC would be inconsistent with the Veterans Health Administration's stated mission of honoring

America's veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

We ask that you carefully review these considerations, and we look forward to the AIR Commission's public hearing at CWM VAMC to convey its importance to our veterans, their families, and the entire region.

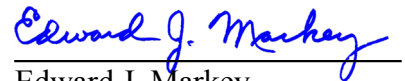
Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



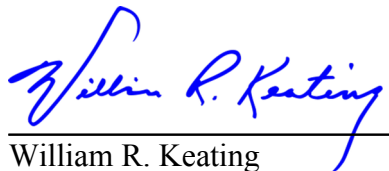
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



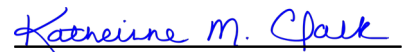
Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress



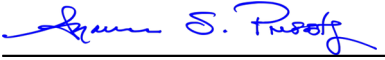
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
Member of Congress



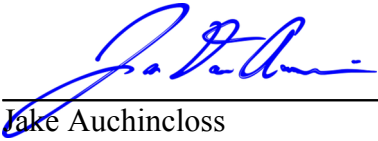
Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



Jake Auchincloss
Member of Congress