

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 5, 2022

The Honorable Martin Heinrich  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Military Construction,  
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Military Construction,  
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Heinrich and Ranking Member Boozman,

As you begin the process of developing spending priorities for the Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bills, we respectfully request robust funding for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs that serve rural veterans.

According to the VA, there are 4.7 million veterans residing in rural areas across the United States, and 2.7 million are enrolled in the VA health care system. These veterans face unique challenges accessing the quality, timely VA services they earned through their service to our nation.

We therefore request that the VA's Office of Rural Health (ORH) be funded at \$327 million in FY23, a \$20 million increase over the president's budget request and consistent with last year's enacted funding level. ORH funding supports national programs, special projects, and research initiatives aimed at better serving rural veterans including:

- Clinical Resource Hubs, which utilize both in-person and telehealth solutions to increase rural veteran access to primary, mental health, and specialty care;
- Several need-specific telehealth programs, including rehabilitation, care for rural veterans with HIV, and web-based therapy for military sexual trauma;
- Five Veterans Rural Health Resources Centers, which facilitate research, innovation, and technical assistance in support of rural veterans; and
- Rural Consultants at each of the nation's 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) to support each VISN in addressing rural veteran-specific needs and issues.

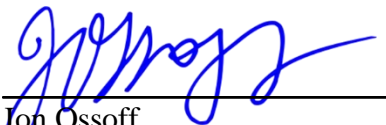
Transportation also remains a key barrier to access for rural veterans. According to an ORH assessment, transportation is the top challenge facing rural veterans, who tend to live in areas with fewer health care facilities and providers, and face unique socioeconomic challenges.

According to the VA, 55% of VA-enrolled rural veterans are 65 or older and 44% of enrolled rural veterans earn an annual income of less than \$35,000.

We therefore request robust funding to expand and improve transportation access to and from facilities that serve rural veterans. This includes funding for: The Veterans Transportation Service, which provides several transportation options to improve veteran access to services, often in partnership with veteran service organizations and local entities; the Highly Rural Transportation Grants (HRTG) program, which aids veterans in areas with fewer than seven people per square mile; and the Beneficiary Travel program, which provides essential reimbursement for mileage and travel expenses. Funding should also be sufficient to enable the VA and ORH to implement innovative transportation pilot programs to improve rural veteran access to VA services.

Congress must ensure the VA has the resources necessary to reach all of our veterans, no matter where they live. Our rural veterans have earned the right to quality, timely, and accessible care. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,




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Jon Ossoff  
United States Senator



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M. Michael Rounds  
United States Senator



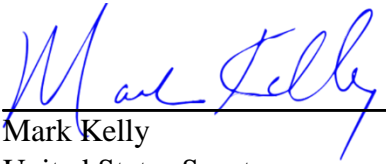
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Jon Tester  
United States Senator



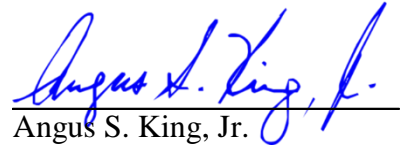
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Tom Cotton  
United States Senator



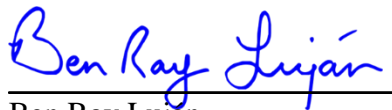
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Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



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Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator  
Chair, Subcommittee on  
Strategic Forces



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Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



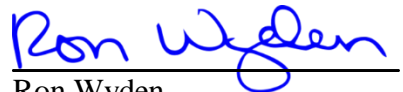
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Raphael G. Warnock  
United States Senator



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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



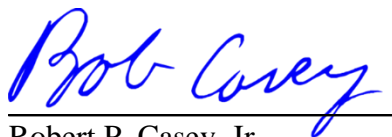
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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



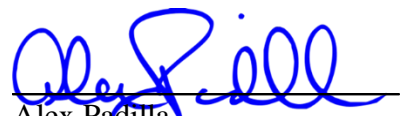
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John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator




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Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



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Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator