

January 18, 2023

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

As you prepare the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) budget request for fiscal year (FY) 2024 for future VA infrastructure projects, I ask that you prioritize areas of the country where the number of veterans enrolled in VA healthcare is projected to increase in the coming years. Doing so is not only essential to ensuring our nation's veterans receive efficient, timely, and impactful care, but is common sense budgeting. As Congress authorizes and appropriates funding for the VA with the intent for these resources to best serve veterans, I expect the levels of spending on new VA healthcare infrastructure will be proportional to changes in local veterans populations.

As you know, the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission established by the *VA MISSION Act of 2018* (P.L. 115-182), required a nationwide assessment of the VA's current infrastructure, and accompanying market recommendations to ensure the location of VA's future investment in new facilities is equivalent to market demand for VA healthcare. While the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023* (P.L. 117-328) prevented further funding for the AIR Commission, I believe that the VA's recommendations outlined for Florida speak to the growing need to posture VA resources more efficiently to provide the best possible care.

Florida is home to approximately 1.5 million veterans, making up 12 percent of our state's population 18 years and older, with a significant portion of those veterans over 65 years old.¹ Additionally, Florida is now the fastest-growing state in the nation, growing by 1.9 percent in 2022.² Given recent record population growth in Sunshine State, accessing VA healthcare will only become more difficult for veterans if there are no changes VA infrastructure in the state.

The VA's recommendations for Florida would immensely benefit veterans, and include the construction of 20 new VA facilities, including a VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Jacksonville, the fastest growing VA market in Florida with a projected 7.2 percent increase in

¹ <https://www.floridavets.org/our-veterans/>

² <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/florida-fastest-growing-state.html#:~:text=Florida's%20population%20increased%20by%201.9,its%201946%20population%20of%202%2C440%2C000.>

veterans enrolled in VA healthcare by FY2029.³ Further, the VAMC in Miami, which is more than 50 years old, is due for replacement as the facility “does not meet the current VA design standards for modern health care.”⁴ Additional needs identified include the construction of eight VA Community Living Centers (CLC) as well as six new VA clinics across the state.

The VA’s assessment makes clear that the needs of veterans and the future of VA healthcare require quality care through “facilities and services...where the Veterans are,” and that the VA “must look to the future” in order to ensure that VA healthcare meets the evolving needs of veterans.⁵ From the need for additional CLCs to modernization of existing facilities, I hear from Florida’s veterans every day about the need for these additional facilities and services. Therefore, I ask that you take into account these expected projections of growth and need when finalizing your FY 2024 budget request.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

³ <https://www.va.gov/AIRCOMMISSIONREPORT/docs/VISN08-Market-Recommendation.pdf>

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ <https://www.va.gov/aircommissionreport/>