

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 23, 2015

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

We understand the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is developing a proposal to consolidate all non-VA community care programs consistent with the VA Budget and Choice Improvement Act of 2015. This legislation mandates that VA develop a plan that incorporates the strengths of non-VA provider programs, and to the greatest extent possible utilize infrastructure and networks of existing non-VA provider programs. We believe, if implemented according to what is in the best interests of veterans, and if the plan adequately capitalizes on the demonstrated success of the Access Received Closer to Home (ARCH) program, this consolidation could be a positive step forward in VA's delivery of quality and timely health care.

ARCH provides medical care for veterans living in rural areas or for those who are burdened with long wait times for services. Since 2011, it has successfully operated in five locations - Caribou, Maine; Farmville, Virginia; Pratt, Kansas; Flagstaff, Arizona; and Billings and Anaconda, Montana. According to Congressionally mandated reports to the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs, more than 90 percent of veterans participating in ARCH are overwhelmingly satisfied with their access to care and the medical services they receive from the participating community providers.

Following passage of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 which extended the ARCH program, we have routinely sought updates regarding the future of ARCH and potential options for expansion across the country. Regrettably, we remain without a clear picture of the future of this beneficial program. Prior to the release of the VA's consolidation plan and report due to Congress by November 1, 2015, we are once again seeking your views and position on the sustainment of the ARCH program.

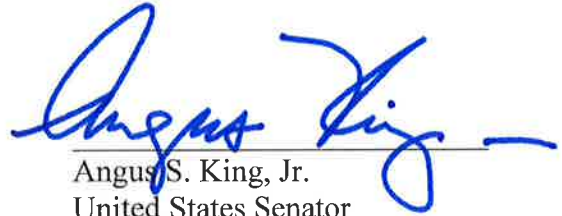
Since the Choice Program was established, it has been plagued by numerous troubling implementation problems, some of which remain unresolved. Considering the resounding success of the ARCH program and high rate of satisfaction with the care the veterans receive, we believe that VA's plan should closely model the ARCH experience. The established network and system of providers created by ARCH serve as an invaluable guide to best leverage the capacity of existing non-VA community care providers to serve veterans in geographically isolated areas. We urge you to maintain this provider network as the consolidation of non-VA community care moves forward to avoid lapses in care and to further our shared goal of improving the Veterans Choice Program. If we are not persuaded that the VA's consolidation plan sufficiently incorporates the sustainment of the ARCH program, we will seek the prompt passage of legislation that would permanently authorize the program.

Veterans deserve a VA worthy of their service and sacrifice. We must make certain that the Veterans Choice Program focuses on what is in the best interests of veterans and incorporates the successes of ARCH. We look forward to your response regarding the future of ARCH, and we are committed to working with you to ensure continuity of care throughout the transition of a consolidated Veterans Choice Program.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Jerry Moran
Jerry Moran
United States Senator