

United States Senate

November 25, 2019

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

I write to request that Kansas be considered for the next location of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations (ATLAS) program. ATLAS allows rural veterans to receive telehealth in the comfort of their community using the infrastructure of local public and private organizations. Kansas is an ideal candidate for the ATLAS program because of its lack of accessible and reliable broadband in individual homes and the number of potential public and private partners.

Rural veterans living in Kansas will benefit from expanded access to telehealth in their community as ATLAS continues to grow beyond the pilot locations in Montana, Pennsylvania, California and Virginia. Telehealth already has the ability to provide rural Americans with VA providers, but this telehealth access is dependent on reliable broadband access in the veteran's home. Currently, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) claims that up to 25 percent of rural Kansans have access to only two (2) broadband providers. This determination is likely skewed, however, because today's availability maps consider an entire census block to be served even if service is only available in one location within that block. Rural Kansans often do not have access to high-speed broadband within their residence, so allowing rural veterans in Kansas the opportunity to travel to a local hub would provide them with quality care in a timely manner.

Kansas would also be a quality candidate for ATLAS's next location because of the availability of potential locations spread throughout the state. Philips ATLAS Walls or Pods are currently planned to be located at select Walmart stores, American Legion and VFW Posts. There are currently 83 Walmart's, 275 American Legion Posts, and 113 VFW Posts across Kansas. Utilizing one of these locations to expand ATLAS would grant veterans living in America's heartland with quality telehealth they currently cannot enjoy, yet deserve.

Kansas is uniquely situated to host the next rollout of the VA ATLAS program because of the challenges our veterans face while accessing reliable broadband, and because of the availability of potential ATLAS sites located across our state. The VA has already developed and implemented an impressive telehealth program to date. Providing telehealth care to 782,000 veterans in Fiscal Year 2018 is surely a step in the right direction, and I request that you continue to expand this effort for the 9.3 million veterans who are currently enrolled in VA care.

Secretary Wilkie, I sincerely thank you for your genuine dedication to the men and women who proudly served their nation. Now, it is our turn to serve them, and ATLAS is a great way to bring the VA to veterans and their families.

Thank you for the time you have dedicated to reading this letter, and I look forward to working with you to expand quality telehealth to the nearly 200,000 veterans who reside in Kansas.

Sincerely,



Jerry Moran
United States Senator

CC: Mr. Bill Oxford, Commander, The American Legion
Mr. William "Doc" Schmitz, Commander-in-Chief, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. Doug McMillon, President and CEO, Walmart Inc.