

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 30, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins:

We write as Members of the New York Congressional delegation to strongly oppose the proposed staffing cuts and benefits changes to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) that threaten the well-being of those who have bravely served our nation. This proposal would cut 80,000 employees - over 15% of the VA's total workforce - who help provide health care, housing, and other services to our veterans,¹ including more than a quarter of whom are veterans themselves.² We urge you to immediately reverse course on the proposed firings and ensure that the more than 688,000 veterans in New York State receive timely care, benefits, and peace of mind.

VHA facilities reported a total of 2,959 severe occupational staffing shortages nationwide in fiscal year 2024. New York facilities reported at least 143 severe staffing shortages.³ New York's VA facilities have already suffered after the dismissal of more than 1,000 probationary employees nationwide.⁴

These shortages and firings have directly affected care quality by leading to reduced patient-provider interaction, longer wait times for appointments, delays in benefits, and increased workloads for existing staff. Ultimately, these conditions compromise the level of care veterans receive. In February, the Castle Point VA in the Hudson Valley temporarily closed due to inadequate staffing, with employees citing the federal hiring freeze as a key roadblock to getting the providers needed for the community.⁵ At the Bronx VA, 20-year veteran Luke Graziani was abruptly fired weeks before his probationary period ended, leaving a vacuum in internal and external communications for the facility. While we are glad to see Mr. Graziani reinstated, the chaos and recklessness of these actions have created a widespread atmosphere of fear and instability across the state.⁶

The PACT Act was transformational legislation that expanded eligibility for VA healthcare and benefits for veterans with toxic exposures during their military service. Since passage, over 796,000 veterans have enrolled

¹ Fox News, "‘Changes that actually help our veterans’: VA secretary defends proposed 15% workforce reduction," March 11, 2025, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/changes-actually-help-our-veterans-va-secretary-defends-proposed-15-workforce-reduction>.

² Pew Research, "What we know about veterans who work for the federal government," April 10, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/04/10/what-we-know-about-veterans-who-work-for-the-federal-government/>.

³ Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General, "OIG Determination of Veterans Health Administration's Severe Occupational Staffing Shortages Fiscal Year 2024," August 7, 2024, <https://www.vaoig.gov/reports/national-healthcare-review/oig-determination-veterans-health-administrations-severe-0>.

⁴ Department of Veterans Affairs, "VA dismisses more than 1,000 employees," press release, February 13, 2025, <https://news.va.gov/press-room/va-dismisses-more-than-1000-employees/>.

⁵ News12, "Castle Point temporarily closes inpatient medical unit for veterans suffering from substance abuse," February 3, 2025, <https://longisland.news12.com/castle-point-temporarily-closes-inpatient-medical-unit-for-veterans-suffering-from-substance-abuse>.


⁶ Bronx Times, "Army vet Luke Graziani reinstated at Bronx VA following federal staffing cuts," April 9, 2025, <https://www.bxtimes.com/army-vet-luke-graziani-reinstated-at-bronx-va-following-federal-staffing-cuts/>.

in VA healthcare with over 4.8 million claims received.⁷ To handle the surge in veterans becoming eligible for care, the VA needed to hire more employees to process claims, provide healthcare, and manage the expanded services. Cutting VA employee levels back to pre-PACT Act levels would be detrimental to veterans' care and benefits, leading to longer wait times for appointments, claims processing, increased costs in care, and a significant decrease in mental health services.⁸

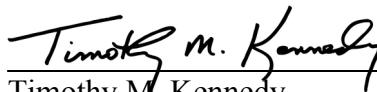
The New York Congressional delegation has consistently fought for public, high-quality, accessible health care for our veterans. In New York, we have worked to keep facilities open, expand services, and fight for critical investments to ensure our veterans receive the care they deserve. These firings will threaten the agency's core mission to provide quality healthcare, timely delivery of benefits, and housing resources for our veterans. It is the federal government's responsibility to "honor the contract," – we must honor that commitment by providing the care, benefits, and opportunities every veteran has earned through their sacrifice.

As Members of the New York Congressional delegation, we stand united in demanding that the administration reverse course on your proposed staffing and benefits cuts that will cripple the livelihoods of our veteran constituents.

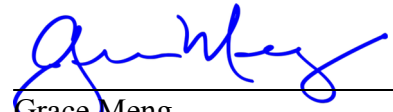
Sincerely,



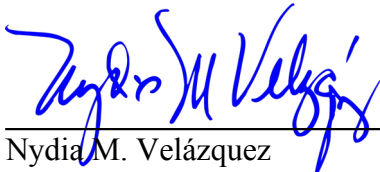
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



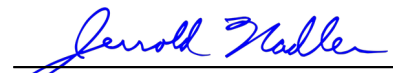
Timothy M. Kennedy
Member of Congress



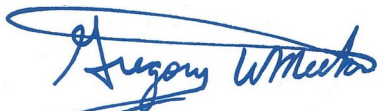
Grace Meng
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Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
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Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress



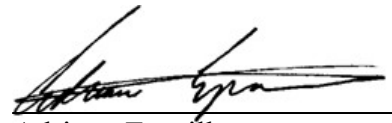
Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress

⁷ Department of Veterans Affairs, "In two years of the PACT Act, VA has delivered benefits and health care to millions of toxic-exposed Veterans and their survivors," press release, August 9, 2024, <https://news.va.gov/press-room/in-two-years-of-the-pact-act-va-has-delivered-benefits-and-health-care-to-millions-of-toxic-exposed-veterans-and-their-survivor/>.

⁸ Military.com, "83,000 VA Employees Slated to Be Fired This Year by Musk's DOGE, Memo Says," March 5, 2025, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/03/05/va-plans-fire-83000-employees-musks-help-eliminating-pact-act-staffing-increase.html>.



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