Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 20, 2021

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

Dear Secretary McDonough:

We write to express our concern regarding the lack of response to our April 22, 2021 letter requesting your support for the on-time construction and completion of a previously approved Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Residential Treatment Program center at the Togus VA Medical Center, for the inclusion of this project on the VA Secretary's Priority Projects list, and that the center receive required Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 construction funding and expedited priority for VA contracting.

As we noted in our April 22nd letter, the timely construction and completion of this facility is crucial for the mental health and well-being of Maine veterans. The lack of in-state SUD and mental health care constitutes a profound burden for Maine veterans, who must choose between being sent hundreds of miles out of state for care or foregoing treatment in order to avoid being separated from loved ones and communities. On that basis, your predecessor acknowledged the need for a SUD program at the medical center, and in August 2020 the VA approved an out of cycle Strategic Capital Investment (SCIP) request to construct a 24-bed, state of the art SUD facility at Togus.

Our letter noted that the need for such a facility at Togus has only increased since last year given that veterans suffering from stressors such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are often uniquely impacted by the social distancing and isolation challenges imposed by the pandemic.

In light of the urgent needs for in-state SUD and mental health care in Maine, as well the VA's previous approval for a SUD facility at Togus, we request an update on this issue from your office no later than Friday, July 23, 2021.

Sincerely,

Jared F. Golden
Member of Congress

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Angus S. King
United States Senator