

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 11, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

Thank you for your continued efforts to maintain quality care for our nation's veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic. We write to express our support for the VA Healthcare System's transition to telehealth medical care in order to observe social distancing guidelines established by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). As you know, the VA is the nation's largest healthcare provider, and the Department's ability to provide effective telehealth care is crucial to our nationwide effort to combat this health crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents complex health care challenges to all Americans, and especially to our nation's veterans. Rural veterans in particular can face substantial obstacles to accessing healthcare.<sup>1</sup> With travel severely restricted, and social distancing guidelines in effect, many rural veterans are turning to telehealth to receive the care they need.

The transition to telehealth is not an easy one, especially for veterans that prefer the close interaction with their doctor or health care provider. We are committed to help ensure that the VA receives the support it needs during this difficult time, so that our veterans receive the healthcare they require.

To that end, we respectfully ask for information regarding the following:

1. In what ways has the VA expanded its telehealth opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What shortcomings does the VA currently face in providing telehealth to rural areas?
3. Are there particular programs that have resulted in a loss in quality of care due to

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: Rural Veteran Healthcare Challenges, <https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/ruralvets.asp> (accessed April 29, 2020).

telehealth procedures?

4. What assistance does the VA need from Congress to ensure timely, effective health care—particularly telehealth care—for rural veterans?

Again, thank you for your work supporting Maine veterans and veterans throughout our great nation. Should you have any questions about this request, please do not hesitate to contact us or have your staff contact Matthew Rich (Rep. Golden) at 202-981-3488, Mike Wakefield (Senator Collins) at 202-224-2523, Todd Stein (Rep. Pingree) at 202-225-6116, or Jack Faherty (Senator King) at 202-244-5344.

Sincerely,



Jared Golden  
Member of Congress



Susan M. Collins  
U.S. Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.  
U.S. Senator



Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress