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**United States Senate**  
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JON TOWERS, STAFF DIRECTOR

March 19, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write to request expedited vaccine distribution to the dedicated staff of the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC). The COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis has further heightened the need for veterans to have timely access to their earned benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In order to receive those benefits, many veterans need access to their records stored at the NPRC. Due to the pandemic, NPRC has closed and while the Center continues to work remotely and provide records on an emergency basis, the pandemic has created a backlog of almost half a million record requests.

The NPRC facility, located in St. Louis, Missouri, holds over two million cubic feet of military personnel and medical records. These records only exist in paper form and cannot be accessed electronically by veterans or their families. Typically NPRC receives over a million requests for records every year, and under usual circumstances those record requests are typically completed in under 10 days. Veterans need these records to access VA-administered programs, including health care, education, disability, pension, and burial benefits.

While the pandemic has slowed efforts, NPRC is doing everything in their power to continue to get records out to the veterans and families that request them. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), who oversees the NPRC, expedited processing of certain requests to help mitigate the growing backlog. NARA expanded the work week, started second shifts doubling the on-site workforce, and partnered with VA employees to help get those records to the veterans that need them. However, this is not enough to keep up with the increasing backlog of record requests.

We are concerned with the growing number of veterans unable to get the benefits they have earned because they are waiting on paperwork. For instance, our offices have had to directly intervene in numerous cases back in our home states of Montana and Kansas. In one case, there was a Montana veteran facing a retirement deadline who needed to retrieve his DD Form 214 by March 1<sup>st</sup> and after months of sending requests to NPRC, it was not until it was an emergency that my office was able to get the veteran their records. In Kansas, the family of a deceased veteran reached out for a DD Form 214 in order to receive military burial honors, and

despite it being a time-sensitive request the backlog pushed the receipt of this document past the funeral date. Fortunately, a local veterans' organization was able to provide military honors at the funeral, and the DD Form 214 did allow the family to apply for burial benefits through the VA. In another case, an 87 year old veteran needed in-home care through VA after the passing of his wife, and he feared going to a nursing home because of COVID-19. In the above cases, our offices needed to directly intervene in order to get the records so they could access their earned benefits through VA. While NPRC staff was very cooperative and ensured the needed documents were delivered in time, these were exceptions to the long delays most veterans are facing due to the backlog. Currently, our offices alone have dozens of pending cases with most of them being veterans requesting copies of their military records to aid them with their VA claim for benefits.

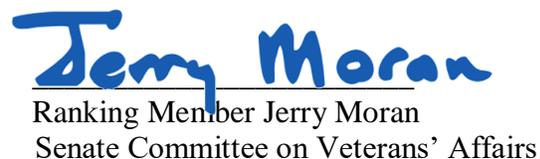
Additional funding in the American Rescue Plan will help alleviate some of the strain on the NPRC, \$150 million of which is specifically intended for NPRC and the additional digitization of records during the pandemic. Unfortunately, funding alone will not allow them to return to full capacity, therefore we ask you to direct vaccines to the NPRC staff so they can return to work as soon as possible. If they are unable to return in-person soon, it could mean years of continued backlog for veterans seeking their much needed benefits. We commend the tireless work the NPRC continues to do, but they need your quick action to ensure they can return to in-person as soon as possible. We have spoken on this issue with Secretary McDonough, and he has expressed his support and willingness to ensure NPRC employees get vaccinated from the VA's allotment.

Currently there are three safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines available under FDA emergency use authorization. You have also said that by the end of May there will be enough vaccines for every adult in the United States. We commend your efforts to ensure every American can get a vaccine. As the supply chain continues to improve, we respectfully request you direct COVID-19 vaccine doses to the staff of NPRC so they can return to their essential work of getting veterans the documentation they need to receive the benefits they have earned.

Sincerely,



Chairman Jon Tester  
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Ranking Member Jerry Moran  
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs