

Good morning. I am Kirk Long and I thank Senator Cassidy for his invitation to speak today. I am also a United States Marine Corps veteran, and the proud father of an active-duty Marine currently serving at Camp Pendleton, California.

I have been a hospital developer and operator for over 30 years, with the past 15 years being spent as the Chief Executive Officer of Crescent City Surgical Centre, located in Metairie, LA. Crescent City Surgical Centre is a licensed general acute care hospital focusing on a broad array of specialized care, to include neurosurgery, orthopedics, surgical oncology, pain management, and mental awareness. Our provider network is large and is augmented by a partnership with LCMC Health, the largest hospital system in New Orleans region.

The barriers to access the Community Care Network are particularly onerous. Put simply, without the help of a congressional office, it is very unlikely to receive a returned phone call. Then, when and if you do, you will be presented with a “boiler plate” contract with lower than market payment rates. There is no room for negotiation. All of this, combined with the administrative difficulties of communicating with the VA in general, present little to no incentive for private network providers to engage.

However, these challenges encouraged our team to propose the creation of a pilot program that would augment the current VA system. Specifically, our intent was to address the egregious wait times many veterans encounter, especially if they need specialized care. We learned that the NOLA VA Medical Center was faced with many staffing shortages, especially in the surgical specialties. Since our network does have access to these specialists, we are confident that we will be able to successfully reduce these wait times and treat the veterans in a timely manner. We have presented this project to various stakeholders in Louisiana, and have been encouraged by the response.

Additionally, we are encouraged by the ACCESS ACT legislation currently making its way through Congress. It is apparent that the members of Congress such as you, Senator Cassidy, as well as the other members of the US House and Senate VA committees, have heard about the many challenges of working with the Community Care Networks, and are working hard to address them. We applaud the good work being done.

We are also encouraged by the renewed focus within the new ACCESS ACT legislation to address the dire mental health issues currently faced by our veteran community. We are especially encouraged by the call for a number of new mental health pilot programs. I would like to take this opportunity to announce the creation of a new mental health facility in the New Orleans region, the Crescent City Behavioral Health Center. The comprehensive care provided at the new center will include both inpatient, outpatient, and partial hospitalization mental health services in a safe and comfortable environment. The center will also be committed to the treatment of chronic pain, including the myriad of organic and degenerative diseases contributing to the mental illness. We also recognize the need for additional substance abuse disorder services, and intend to include this in the services we will offer.

I will be happy to discuss any of the further details or answer any questions at your convenience.