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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 6, 2020

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Richard A. Stone, M.D.
Executive in Charge
Veterans Health Administration
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Dr. Stone,

With the rapid spread of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) and its expansion to the United States, we write to request information on what steps the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is taking to protect the health and safety of veterans and the dedicated staff who care for them. Given the emergent nature of the virus, we want to ensure that veterans and staff can count on VA health care facilities to be fully prepared for prevention, diagnosis, and response efforts. We encourage VA to proactively reach out to us and our Senate colleagues if any additional resources or authorities are needed to help keep VA facilities safe during this outbreak.

The World Health Organization has declared the coronavirus outbreak a global health emergency and the first human-to-human transmission of the novel coronavirus was recently reported in the US. Now that the US has declared the novel coronavirus a public health emergency, we are concerned about the potential impact on VA patients and staff. VA is the nation's largest health care system, with 172 medical facilities and 1,241 outpatient sites, 9 million enrolled veterans, and employing more than 322,000 staff across the country, making it particularly important for VA to be fully equipped and prepared to handle the coronavirus outbreak.

We were pleased to see your January 30 message to patients and staff on the coronavirus and to hear that VA is closely monitoring the situation. We would ask you to keep us updated as any developments occur at VA, and for your help in better understanding VA's coronavirus response by responding to the following questions:

- How is VA working in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other Federal partners on coronavirus preparedness and response?
- What is currently known about the risk 2019-nCoV poses to health care workers? How is VA communicating with its facilities to ensure providers remain healthy and safe?
- How is VA communicating with patients about steps to prevent coronavirus and how to access testing and treatment if coronavirus is suspected?

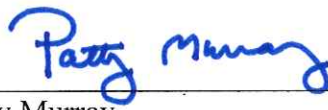
- Is VA providing standardized training and guidance to Department facilities so that providers are equipped to safely assess and treat any potential cases of coronavirus?
- Do all VA facilities have the proper equipment and supplies necessary to treat any potential or confirmed coronavirus cases? Does VA have access to the rapid testing kits for diagnosing coronavirus?
- Do VA facilities have dedicated, sterile space for isolating potential or confirmed coronavirus cases? And if no such care environment is available, does each facility have a plan for where the patient should be sent and how?
- Does VA need any additional resources or action from Congress to help with coronavirus response and preparedness?

We appreciate your collaboration on ensuring that VA facilities are prepared to respond to this global health emergency, and the health and safety of veterans and providers is protected.


Sincerely,



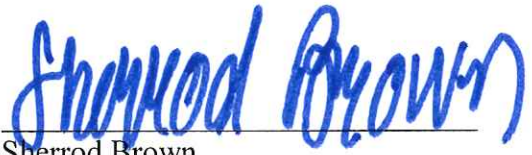
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United States Senator



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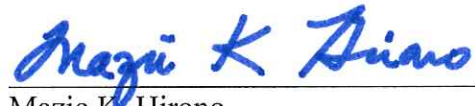
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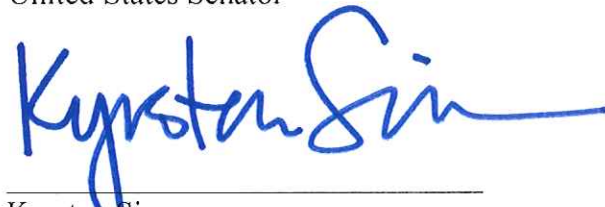
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