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# United States Senate

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May 24, 2022

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

We write today to express concerns regarding the volunteer driver certification process and its impact on access to care for rural veterans. Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN) services, primarily provided by the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), help veterans travel to and from Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care appointments. In rural areas, where veterans often have to travel long distances for care and public transportation is scarce, the availability of volunteer drivers often determines whether veterans get the care they need and deserve.


In rural areas across the country, a pressing concern of veterans is access to transportation to get to and from appointments. This is especially true for veterans unable to drive themselves to and from medical appointments for financial or medical reasons. The VTN has stepped in to fill that gap, with the DAV providing volunteer drivers, and even covering costs. Despite the difference these efforts make for veterans, the DAV continues to struggle to receive reciprocal support from VA, which is not certifying volunteer drivers in a timely manner. Drivers, often fellow veterans, reach out to the volunteer coordinator at their local VA Medical Centers to request the appropriate paperwork to participate in the program. Many reportedly never hear back from VA, even with frequent follow-up. If they are not already discouraged from participating in the program, once they finally obtain and submit their paperwork, many must then wait more than six months to receive the physical exam required as part of the volunteer driver certification process. DAV posts across the country have expressed concern that this red tape prevents willing drivers from helping veterans get to their medical appointments and home again safely.

In response to this issue, we passed Public Law 116-315, the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020, in January 2021. Section 7001 of that law required the Department establish a national policy regarding the medical exams required to certify volunteer drivers for the VTN no later than 90 days following its passage. Despite briefings alluding to VA's work responding to this requirement and multiple requests for updates, Congress is not aware of any such policy more than a year after that deadline passed.

We are calling on VA to quickly develop and disseminate a straightforward, standardized and timely process for certifying volunteer drivers. As part of that effort, VA's Office of Occupational Health should have an open dialogue with DAV, other stakeholders in the VTN, and veterans themselves. Once this process is finalized, VA should undergo a concerted effort to not only disseminate the updated guidance, but also seek out and recruit volunteers, especially those who began the certification process but discontinued it after facing too much bureaucracy to continue.


We look forward to working with you on remedying these problems and helping expedite this process to benefit veterans with transportation needs.

Sincerely,




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Jon Tester  
Chairman



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Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



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Thom Tillis  
United States Senator