

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 21, 2026

The Honorable Douglas A. Collins
Secretary
US Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins:

We write to follow up on our May 14 letter¹ regarding staffing and workforce challenges at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities across Virginia and the Department's decision to eliminate more than 1,700 vacant positions across the Commonwealth. Our concern and focus remain ensuring that VA facilities have the workforce necessary to provide Virginia veterans with timely, high-quality care. Recent information, however, continues to support these doubts.

While we note your August 26 response to our letter, which provided updated information regarding filled full-time equivalent (FTE) positions and vacancies for which the VA was hiring at the Hampton, Richmond, and Salem VA Medical Centers, many of our questions remain unanswered. Your response stated that approximately 26,000 unfilled positions nationwide were eliminated because VA determined that those positions were unneeded, and that these positions had "made it difficult for VA to properly identify and prioritize staffing needs across its facilities." The response did not, however, outline criteria by which vacancies were determined to be "unneeded," share the staffing models backing current facility staffing levels, or detail any facility-level concurrence with these staffing decisions.

Since our initial letter, additional information has continued to raise questions about staffing levels at VA facilities serving Virginians. Last month, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) released its annual report on severe occupational staffing shortages². This report represents the direct views of facility representatives across the country and their characterizations of these staffing challenges. Nationwide, respondents identified 4,712 severe occupational staffing shortages. Officials reported Medical Officer shortages at 97 percent of VA facilities and Nurse shortages at 86 percent of facilities.

The reporting at Virginia medical centers and their associated healthcare systems seems to reinforce our earlier concerns. The report notes in the Hampton VA Health Care System 86 occupation categories designated as "severe shortage," including 64 clinical occupations; in the Central Virginia VA Health Care System officials identified 15 clinical occupation categories as

¹ <https://www.warner.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/05.14.2026-Letter-to-VA-on-vacancy-cuts.pdf>

² *OIG Report of Veterans Health Administration's Responses on Severe Occupational Staffing Shortages Fiscal Year 2026*, US Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (September 11, 2026)
https://www.vaoig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2026-09/vaoig-26-01046-271_-_final.pdf

“severe shortage”; and in the Salem VA Health Care System officials identified 12 occupation categories as “severe shortage,” eight clinical and four nonclinical. Our review of the vacancy information previously provided to our offices indicates some degree of overlap between previously eliminated vacant positions in Virginia, and occupations identified in Virginia facilities as experiencing severe shortages. This raises questions as to how these facility vacancies had been considered “unnecessary” by Department leadership, at the same time as facility representatives were identifying severe shortages for similar or overlapping positions.

In addition to the information from OIG, recent media reporting³ has asserted that for the new VA Health Care Center in Fredericksburg, staffing challenges have extended beyond recruitment – at least one patient has described successive providers leaving in the past year and a half, suggesting retention and possible continuity of care challenges in a facility that’s been open barely 18 months.

Taken together, these data points continue to suggest a disconnect between the workforce policies put forward by your Department, your Department’s public messaging related to their impact, and the reported experiences coming out of VA facilities across the country. It is less clear today than when we first wrote you, that your Department has a clear handle on facility staffing needs across the country. That is why in addition to repeating our requests for the following information, we request a briefing for our offices, detailing current VA workforce dynamics across Virginia.

1. Your response to our previous letter simply noted that the decision to eliminate approximately 26,000 unfilled positions nationwide “was made in coordination with facilities across the country.”
 - a. What were the criteria by which facility leaders were directed to identify positions “that they don’t need”? Was this determination based on current conditions, or future projections? Were facilities provided a quota or target of any kind?
 - b. Did Department personnel involved in this process receive any concern, pushback, or other feedback in opposition to the vacancy cuts – particularly related to clinical impact, overall workforce health, or personnel morale – from any facility- or VISN-level personnel? What was the process for addressing these concerns?
 - c. Did facility leaders concur with the final determinations regarding vacancy cuts?
2. We again note the statutory requirement for the VA to “develop, validate, and implement a staffing model...that includes appropriate target staffing levels nationally, regionally, and locally to ensure timely access to care and effectively oversee the provision of care by the Department, whether at a facility of the Department or through a non-Department provider”.⁴ We further recognize that various staffing models and caseload requirements already exist in the Department for positions from nurses to housing services case managers.

³ Brian Todd, *VA built dozens of new veteran health centers but can’t find enough doctors and staff*, CNN (Oct 1, 2026, accessed Oct 9, 2026), <https://www.cnn.com/2026/10/01/politics/veterans-affairs-health-centers-doctor-staff-shortage>

⁴ P.L.118-210, *Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act*, Section 146

- a. Based on the position allocations for each facility in Virginia, which facilities are meeting the current minimum staffing for these models and caseload requirements? Which facilities are not meeting these requirements and by how much?
3. Congress has provided VA with additional tools and resources specifically intended to help the Department recruit and retain personnel in difficult-to-fill positions, including via expanded recruitment, relocation, and retention incentives; critical-skills incentives; student loan repayment authorities; and additional pay flexibilities.
 - a. Relevant to severe occupational shortages in Virginia and elsewhere around the country, how and where have you utilized available recruitment, relocation, or retention incentives, as well as employment flexibilities? Have these authorities been so far utilized to the maximum extent?
4. For facilities in Virginia, including newly opened Fredericksburg and Chesapeake clinics, how many personnel have left employment with the VA since January 2025? Please provide data broken down by facility.
5. Please provide a complete list of positions for each facility in Virginia broken down by location and hiring status as of October 1, 2026.
6. Have any facilities in Virginia requested authorization to recruit for a position above their allocation? If so, please provide an accounting of each request and its status. For any denied requests, please provide justification for the denial.
 - a. What are the steps for facility leaders to request positions above the cap? Please provide the names and titles of individuals above the facility level who review and decide to approve or deny these requests.
7. For facilities in Virginia with funding to hire for vacant positions that were cut in Fiscal Year 2026, what was that funding used for instead?

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator