

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 12, 2026

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins,

As the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) undertakes its planned reorganization of the Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) structure into five regional networks under the VA RISE Initiative, I write to emphasize the importance of ensuring that the unique needs of New Mexico's veterans are not diminished within a larger organizational framework. While we appreciate the Department's efforts to modernize its healthcare delivery system, any restructuring must improve—not weaken—the quality, accessibility, and responsiveness of care for veterans living in rural communities.

New Mexico is home to more than 125,000 veterans, many of whom reside in geographically isolated areas where access to healthcare is already limited. Veterans in my state face unique challenges, including long travel distances to VA medical centers, shortages of specialty care providers, limited broadband access for telehealth services, and a disproportionately high percentage of Native American, Hispanic, and Latino veterans whose healthcare needs are best served through culturally competent care and strong partnerships with Tribal governments and the Indian Health Service. Additionally, New Mexico has one of the nation's highest concentrations of rural veterans, making local decision-making and resource allocation particularly important.

While New Mexico was previously aligned under VISN 22 and 17, veterans and stakeholders repeatedly expressed concerns that the state's priorities were overshadowed by larger population centers within the VISN. Resource allocation, executive attention, and operational decision-making often favored larger facilities, leaving New Mexico veterans feeling underrepresented despite facing some of the greatest barriers to care. Differences in geography, demographics, and healthcare infrastructure between New Mexico and the rest of the VISN complicated efforts to tailor services to the state's unique needs.

As the Department establishes a new five-VISN structure, I urge VA leadership to ensure that the unique needs of New Mexico's veterans are prioritized and that past hurdles to adequate health care do not persist. Specifically, I request that the Department:

- Establish dedicated regional leadership responsible for advocating exclusively for New Mexico's veterans and ensuring the state's healthcare priorities remain visible within the larger VISN structure.
- Preserve and expand access to community care where VA facilities remain geographically inaccessible, while maintaining strong oversight to ensure timely, high-quality care.
- Continue investments in telehealth infrastructure, mobile health care services, and rural outreach programs to better serve veterans in remote communities.
- Strengthen partnerships with Tribal governments, Tribal health systems, and the Indian Health Service to improve coordination of care for Native American veterans.
- Prioritize recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals in rural New Mexico facilities through targeted workforce initiatives.

- Maintain transparent performance metrics specific to New Mexico, including appointment wait times, specialty care access, community care utilization, and veteran satisfaction, so Congress and veterans can evaluate whether the reorganization is producing meaningful improvements.

The success of this reorganization should ultimately be measured not by administrative efficiencies alone, but by whether veterans experience faster access to care, improved health outcomes, and greater confidence in the VA healthcare system. New Mexico's unique geography and veteran population require sustained attention and dedicated leadership to ensure that organizational changes do not unintentionally widen existing disparities in access to care.

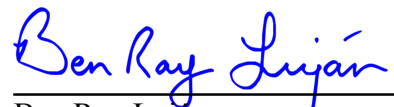
We respectfully request that the Department provide an overview of how New Mexico's unique healthcare needs will be incorporated into the new VISN structure, including what safeguards will be implemented to ensure the state receives equitable resources, leadership engagement, and operational support following the reorganization.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your continued commitment to serving those who have worn our nation's uniform. We look forward to working with you to ensure that every New Mexico veteran receives the high-quality healthcare they have earned.

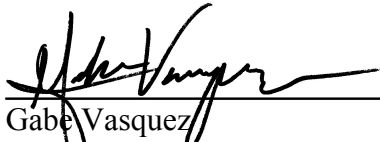
Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



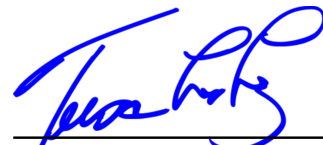
Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Gabe Vasquez
Member of Congress



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Teresa Leger Fernandez
Member of Congress