

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1806

September 8, 2023

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20421

Dear Secretary McDonough,

It is my understanding that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is fast closing on the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the new VA Clinic in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Despite the years of fighting hard for this clinic, I respectfully urge you to extend the RFP process to ensure that Capital Region Veterans are provided with the best, most accessible care they so richly deserve.

As you know, I worked hard to author the legislation authorizing a new Baton Rouge VA Outpatient Clinic. This legislation was included in the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act. The enactment of this language marks the end of a long, hard-fought battle to consolidate care under one roof, thereby facilitating greater access and convenience for Veterans in Louisiana.

When first imagined several years ago, the Veteran community envisioned a centrally located facility, easily accessible by car, transit or ride share, and close to health care providers who could offer services not readily available at the VA clinic. Because many Veterans are transported by family members, a clinic located near health and other quality of life services benefits these caregivers, which further benefits the Veteran.

I understand that the VA is considering lease proposals that include options for both a turnkey, new facility with customized modifications and new greenfield construction. By requesting additional time, I am urging the VA to carefully consider all available options in the Greater Baton Rouge area. I am concerned that some site selection criteria could result in superficially overlooking ideal locations that provide ample accessibility and quality of care for Veterans.

For example, new greenfield construction (which in itself is not inherently bad) may cause the VA to miss out on cost savings that result in better care and access for veterans, while also enabling local government resources and services to better accommodate a veteran patient population in an easily accessible area.

By extending the RFP period, there is a greater opportunity for the VA to engage community stakeholders who can either highlight the inherent benefits of specific locations or encourage community stakeholders to create conditions that benefit the VA's administrative interests and the Veteran community's health care interests.

I am glad to discuss this in greater detail with you, but first, and more importantly, we urge you to extend the RFP period for sufficient time to consider all options. Please do not hesitate to contact my office if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Garret Graves", with a stylized, cursive script.

Garret Graves
Member of Congress