

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 24, 2015

Robert A. McDonald  
Secretary  
United States Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Room 500  
Washington D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

I write to call your attention to the need for inpatient care for our veterans in the Central Ohio region. I appreciate your leadership and hope we can continue to work together to fulfill our commitment to providing for our veterans and give them the care they deserve.

In June 2014, I hosted a veteran town hall at the Columbus VA Care Center. During that forum, the most consistent message I heard was the dire need for inpatient services and the major inconvenience it is for veterans and their families to have to travel across the state to Cincinnati and Dayton to receive inpatient care.

In 2003, local VA officials submitted a proposal under the Capital Asset for Realignment and Enhanced Services (CARES) initiative and received funding to build the Columbus VA Care Center at its current location. Unfortunately, I do not believe this proposal fully anticipated the increase in veteran population in Central Ohio. For example, when the Columbus VA Care Center opened its doors in November 2008, the projected patient visits were 310,000 patients a year, and the actual number in FY14 was 473,452 patient visits.

According to the latest U.S. Census statistics, there are currently around 131,809 veterans in Central Ohio, 70,589 of whom reside in Franklin County alone and that number is expected to grow with population increases in the area. A study released last year by Columbus 2020, the Central Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, and the Urban Land Institute projects that the Central Ohio region will add around 500,000 people by 2050 – more than the cities of Cincinnati and Dayton combined. The number of seniors aged 65 or older is expected to more than double by 2050. These imposing figures demonstrate the need for inpatient services for our future veterans.

I look forward to working with your agency to address this issue and ensure veterans in Ohio have the necessary services. I thank you for considering all options and to include consideration of building an inpatient bed tower at the current location or contracting for inpatient services at local hospitals in Central Ohio.

I appreciate your time and attention to this important matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rob Portman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rob Portman