

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0918

February 8, 2021

Acting Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Room 1000
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary:

We write to you with concern that veterans across the nation may be denied access to the COVID 19 vaccine due to a miscommunication regarding eligibility of each veteran to receive medical treatment. Veterans who meet the CDC guidelines and are within their state's tier for immediate immunization are being denied treatment at some Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities for no other reason than they are not currently enrolled in the first eight priority groups of the VA healthcare system. We encourage you to issue guidance to all VA medical facilities which clearly articulates that veterans who meet the CDC and state guidelines for COVID 19 immunization, are eligible to receive that vaccination at VA medical facilities.

Coronavirus Disease 19 caused a global pandemic which requires a whole-of-government effort to eradicate in the United States. On January 21, 2021, President Biden made the Federal government's role in that effort clear when he stated, "our plan starts with mounting an aggressive, safe, and effective vaccination campaign to meet our goal of administering 100,000,000 shots in our first hundred days in office." The Department of Veterans Affairs administers the largest hospital network in the world. The Veterans Health Administration is central to the Federal government's vaccination program and must act as the example to be emulated by all other distribution centers with regard to thoughtful application of the President's response plan.

Section 1710 of Title 38, United States Code, defines the criteria for eligibility of veterans to receive medical care at no expense to the patient. Subsection (a)(3) grants you broad authority to determine eligibility of veterans who may receive care as patients who are willing to pay for treatment. No veteran should be prevented from receiving a COVID 19 vaccination simply because they are not currently enrolled in the eight priority groups established by VA regulation. For as long as the federally administered COVID 19 program is providing vaccinations at no cost to patients, VA medical facilities should provide those vaccinations at no cost to veteran patients in accordance with CDC and state guidelines.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent public health crisis. We look forward to your timely response to these concerns and clarification of VA guidelines on the distribution of COVID 19 vaccinations.

Sincerely,



Brian Mast
Member of Congress



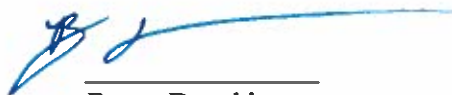
Ted Deutch
Member of Congress



Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress



W. Gregory Steube
Member of Congress



Byron Donalds
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Michael Waltz
Member of Congress



Scott Franklin
Member of Congress



Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress

CC:

Coordinator of the COVID 19-19 Response and Counselor to the President, White House

COVID 19-19 Health Equity Task Force, Department of Health & Human Services