



**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
ARCHULETA COUNTY, COLORADO**

P.O. Box 1507 / 398 Lewis Street / Pagosa Springs, Colorado 81147
Tel (970) 264-8300

July 5, 2022

Honorable Michael Bennet
Southwest Office
1309 East 3rd Avenue, Suite 101
Durango, CO 81301

RE: Support for Veterans Administration (“VA”) clinics in Colorado

Dear Senator Bennet:

On March 3, 2022, VA Healthcare Director Michael Kilmer released the news of the potential for rural VA clinics to be closed in Colorado. The County Commissioners from across the State of Colorado respectfully request that you, as our representative, stand with us to keep our facilities open and show your support for our veterans and our rural communities.

Clinics that will be affected are in Burlington, Lamar, La Junta, and Salida. Veterans from surrounding counties also utilize the clinics located in the proposed closure areas. Veterans travel from Nebraska and Kansas to use these clinics because Colorado VA clinics are closer to them than clinics located in their state. If we count veterans in the surrounding counties to the clinics recommended for closure, around 12,000 rural veterans could be affected. The current number of veterans enrolled at Lamar is 420; La Junta is 608; Burlington is 418 and Salida is 388. We are actively engaged in a campaign to raise those numbers.

There will be serious negative impacts on our communities if these important services are no longer located in our communities and we ask you to consider the following:

1. Rural healthcare facilities would not be able to absorb the veteran population due to the shortage of medical staff.
2. There are going to be problems with veterans using private healthcare facilities. If a veteran seeks treatment without authorization by the VA, the private hospital will send the veteran the bill, which will cause a financial hardship for the veteran.

3. Our aging veteran population would have difficulty making the long (and with rising gas prices, expensive) trip to Pueblo, Colorado Springs, or Denver, and the wait times to access healthcare at these facilities are long for veterans to receive medical care.

4. With the lack of broadband in our area, and lack of technical knowledge and devices to support telehealth, veterans would not be able to get the medical care they desperately need.

5. The closure of the rural VA clinics could force the current staff to relocate to the proposed new and expanded VA hospital in Colorado Springs or the proposed VA clinic in Canon City. This would hurt our local workforce and our communities in a time when rural economic development opportunities are rare.

The only logical conclusion is to have face-to-face medical visits for our rural veterans and keep these rural clinics for our veterans open.

The VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Internal Outside Networks Act of 2018 (or the “VA MISSION Act of 2018”) is a positive step in providing veterans the healthcare they need. According to the Mission Act, an independent evaluation of VA healthcare facilities is done every four years. Additional time is needed to recruit new veterans into our rural clinics, expand telehealth for veterans by our rural providers and increase coverage at our local VA clinics to include spouses of veterans using the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) insurance.

As Americans, we must support our veterans who have served us for so many years. We ask that you vote “**NO**” on the proposed closures. We feel confident that the next evaluation will produce different recommendations.

Thank you in advance for your anticipated support.

Sincerely,

Alvin Schaaf, Chairman



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ARCHULETA COUNTY, COLORADO**

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July 5, 2022

Honorable John Hickenlooper
Southwest Office
1309 East 3rd Avenue, Suite 104
Durango, CO 81301

RE: Support for Veterans Administration (“VA”) clinics in Colorado

Dear Senator Hickenlooper,

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July 5, 2022

Representative Lauren Beobert
743 Horizon Court
Grand Junction, CO 81506

RE: Support for Veterans Administration (“VA”) clinics in Colorado

Dear Representative Boebert,

On March 3, 2022, VA Healthcare Director Michael Kilmer released the news of the potential for rural VA clinics to be closed in Colorado. The County Commissioners from across the State of Colorado respectfully request that you, as our representative, stand with us to keep our facilities open and show your support for our veterans and our rural communities.

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July 5, 2022

Senator Donald Coram
200 E. Colfax Avenue
Room 346
Denver, CO 80203-1784

RE: Support for Veterans Administration (“VA”) clinics in Colorado

Dear Senator Coram,

On March 3, 2022, VA Healthcare Director Michael Kilmer released the news of the potential for rural VA clinics to be closed in Colorado. The County Commissioners from across the State of Colorado respectfully request that you, as our representative, stand with us to keep our facilities open and show your support for our veterans and our rural communities.

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July 5, 2022

Rep. Barbara McLachlan
200 E. Colfax Avenue
Room 307
Denver, CO 80203

RE: Support for Veterans Administration (“VA”) clinics in Colorado

Dear Rep. McLachlan,

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