

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 16, 2025

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

Secretary Collins:

I am writing to express my concern about reports that the Department of Veterans Affairs plans to abruptly eliminate as many as 35,000 healthcare positions this month, including doctors, nurses, and support staff.<sup>1</sup> This plan, as outlined in a memo from November 20th, 2025, has been put forth despite findings from the VA's Office of Inspector General (OIG) that Veterans Health Administration facilities had over 4,000 staffing shortages this fiscal year — a 50 percent increase over fiscal year 2024.<sup>2</sup> Nearly all facilities (94 percent) reported severe shortages of medical officers, while 79 percent reported severe shortages of nurses. These cuts are on top of the VA already eliminating 30,000 jobs this year. At a time of already critical staffing shortfalls, the elimination of these positions will further delay access to care, harm veterans and their families nationwide, and erode trust in the care they are promised and deserve.

While VA leadership has stated that the majority of the positions to be eliminated are currently unfilled, this does not mean they are not necessary. According to recent [reporting](#), under this plan 358 healthcare openings in Phoenix—including nurses and doctors—will be eliminated. The VA Phoenix Health Care System is already facing severe occupational staffing shortages in primary care, mental health, radiology, nursing, and health technician professions, as outlined in a VA OIG report published last August.<sup>3</sup> Due to these staffing shortages, the average wait time for new patients at most Phoenix-area VA facilities was found to be above the standard of 20 days for primary care and mental health appointments.

Our veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors deserve the highest standard of care. VA routinely provides that—but only if there are providers and support staff to see them. We

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<sup>1</sup> Washington Post, “VA plans to abruptly eliminate tens of thousands of health care jobs,” December 13, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/12/13/va-veterans-affairs-job-cuts-trump/>

<sup>2</sup> US Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, “OIG Determination of Veterans Health Administration’s Severe Occupational Staffing Shortages Fiscal Year 2025,” August 12, 2025, <https://www.vaoig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2025-08/vaoig-25-01135-196.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> US Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, “OIG Determination of Veterans Health Administration’s Severe Occupational Staffing Shortages Fiscal Year 2024,” August 7, 2024, <https://www.vaoig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2024-08/vaoig-24-00803-222.pdf>

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urge you to re-evaluate your plan to eliminate these positions and request that you answer the following questions by January 31st:

1. How many clinical and non-clinical staff positions within the VA Health Care System in Arizona do you plan to eliminate as part of this plan? Which positions do you plan to eliminate? Please provide a comprehensive list of facilities that will be subject to these staffing eliminations.
2. VA stated the agency would eliminate about 26,400 unfilled positions described as “mostly covid-era roles that are no longer necessary.” Please outline the specific “covid-era roles” that he is referring to and why they are no longer necessary.
3. While current reporting is that the majority of these positions are unfilled, there have not been assurances that current healthcare providers will not be terminated. How many current healthcare providers (clinical and non-clinical staff) do you plan to terminate in Arizona and nationwide? What is your timeline for laying off such employees and contractors?
4. Public reporting has referenced your forthcoming plan to shrink the network of 18 regional offices that administer the nation’s VA hospitals and medical centers. Which offices will be closing and how was that list determined?
5. More than half<sup>4</sup> of VA medical centers already report shortages of psychologists, and many vacancies remain unfilled. You have repeatedly stated that veterans’ access to mental health care is a top priority. Why, then, are these positions being eliminated rather than making stronger efforts to recruit and retain high-quality mental health professionals to support veterans in need?
6. The elimination of these positions would return the VA to pre-PACT Act staffing levels, despite the fact that more than one million veterans have newly enrolled in VA health care due to expanded eligibility under the PACT Act and millions more have finally begun to receive treatment for toxic-exposure-related illnesses and injuries. Please explain how you will ensure that veterans who have newly enrolled in, or are currently receiving treatment under, the PACT Act—as well as veterans who were receiving care prior to the PACT Act—will continue to have access to timely, high-quality care.
7. It is clear from Office of Inspector General reports and firsthand accounts from VA health care providers that the VA Health Care System is facing severe workforce shortages and is already struggling to meet veterans’ needs. Please provide a detailed plan on how, in light of the elimination of these healthcare positions and apparent closure of

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<sup>4</sup> American Psychological Association, “Deep cutbacks and restructuring at the VA are diminishing care,” October 16, 2025, <https://www.apa.org/topics/military-veterans/va-mental-health-care>

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regional offices, the VA Health Care System will maintain a high standard of care and reduce appointment wait times.

Eliminating over 30,000 health care roles will stretch an already overburdened VA healthcare workforce, leading to longer wait times and reduced access to care for veterans. Your plan threatens to undermine the VA's mission and endanger the care that veterans have earned through their service, and I encourage you to reconsider.

I look forward to your prompt response and attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ruben Gallego". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "R".

Ruben Gallego  
United States Senator