

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 18, 2020

Dr. Joan McInerney
Network Director, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VISN 2 VA New York/New Jersey VA Health Care Network
130 W. Kingsbridge Road
Building 16
Bronx, NY 10468

Dear Dr. McInerney,

We are writing in regard to the recent announcement from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Construction and Facilities Management (CFM) that the VA has canceled the current lease award and procurement process for the Brick Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). The Brick CBOC is a cornerstone of healthcare services for veterans residing in Monmouth, Ocean, and Burlington Counties, and we join our veteran constituents in frustration and disappointment that there will be further delay in the development of a new, expanded facility. The notification received by our offices on Friday, May 1st, indicates that the construction of a new CBOC is now at least two and half years behind schedule. This delay is unacceptable, and we strongly urge the VA to expedite the upcoming bid and award process in order to ensure our veterans are able to receive the quality care promised to them.

As you are aware, Ocean County is home to the largest population of veterans in the State of New Jersey and contains one of the oldest veteran populations per capita in the United States. There is a unique demand on the James J. Howard VA CBOC, which was constructed to serve the nearly 5,000 veterans residing in the region during the early 1990s. Nearly three decades later, the Brick CBOC is currently serving over 10,000 active patients from a community of nearly 90,000 eligible veterans across three New Jersey counties. Despite the twofold increase in demand, the clinic still operates out of the original space and structure that was constructed to serve 5,000 patients. VA Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN) 2 leadership, and leaders in the New Jersey VA Health Care System, have admitted that the Brick VA CBOC is no longer of sufficient size to meet the demands of the population it was designed to serve. With that in mind, it is a disappointment that while VA can recognize the need to expand current capacity in Brick, it does not prioritize doing so in a timely, transparent, or efficient manner.

In addition to serving over 10,000 active patients in the community, the temporary consolidation of all New Jersey CBOCs into four clinic hubs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has relocated patients that normally utilize the Tinton Falls CBOC and the Hamilton CBOC to the James J. Howard CBOC – further straining the facility's clinical capacity. This announcement now requires the Brick CBOC to serve an even larger patient load, without adequate space to do so effectively. When our veterans signed up to serve our nation we made the promise to take care of them on their return. Now more than ever, our veterans need to be able to receive quality, and accessible healthcare, and they deserve to know when the promised new Brick CBOC will finally come to fruition. Thus, on behalf of our veterans and their families, and in the interest of public disclosure and transparency, we respectfully ask for complete written responses to the following questions:

1. Why did the most recent VA CFM solicitation fail? Were there any other communications between the developer and the VA regarding the developer's attempts to change its offer to the VA?

2. With this additional delay, what will the VA do in the interim to immediately increase access, decrease wait times, and improve care for our veterans in Ocean County? Please be as specific as possible as it relates to additional providers, parking, options for additional medical space and patient satisfaction. Additionally, please expand on the proposal for VA employees to park offsite that you previously expressed support for.
3. What steps will the VA take to prevent a third solicitation failure from happening? In order to decrease the timeline to award a new contract, has consideration been given to re-examine already considered top-level bidders or limit the bidding process to the site that was already approved on April 6, 2020? Please include details on why only one bidder met the requirements established by VA CFM for the previous bid.

In addition to the above questions related to the most recent CBOC solicitation failure, we wish to thank you for your response on December 9th, 2019 to our letter, and ask some remaining follow up questions. Specifically, your December response stated that the James J. Howard CBOC will be “fully staffed with nine primary care providers, seven registered nurses (RN), eight licensed practical nurses (LPN) and seven medical support assistants (MSA)” between March and June of this year.

1. Has the VA achieved full staffing at this facility?
2. Are those “fully staffed” goals reflective of meeting the need for the initial patient load of 5,000 or the current 10,000+ veteran patients?
3. What is your current provider to patient load?
4. How does this compare to other VISN-2 providers and other VISN-4 providers?
5. With this most recent delay, what is your plan to retain “full staffing”?

We respectfully ask to be notified of any changes that occur that further impact the timeline of the new CBOC announcement. We also request that you to continue to consider providing quarterly updates to veteran community leaders in the local area either through video conferencing or when public safety measures allow for in-person meetings, beginning at the time of the new CBOC announcement.

Thank you in advance for your time and attention to these important concerns. We stand ready to work with you and your team to ensure that our New Jersey veterans receive the benefits they deserve from an eternally grateful nation. Please do not hesitate to contact us directly to discuss the issue further at any time.

Sincerely,



Andy Kim
Member of Congress



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator