

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

November 30, 2021

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

We are writing to urge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide clarification on the decision to relocate the VA Vinita Outpatient Clinic to Claremore, Oklahoma, invite rebids for a new lease, and possibly reconsider closure of the Vinita VA Clinic.

Since its opening in 2009, the VA Vinita Outpatient Clinic has provided crucial services to thousands of veterans located in nearby Mayes, Craig, Ottawa, Nowata, and Rogers counties. Specifically, the clinic has offered extensive health services and care related to addiction and substance abuse, audiology and speech, clinical and diagnostic testing, mental health, military sexual trauma, PTSD, pain management, and a host of other matters. From our discussions with veterans in the state, community stakeholders, and others, it is clear the Vinita VA Clinic has been a tremendous benefit to veterans in northeastern Oklahoma.

Given this wide acclaim, we were surprised to learn of VA's plans to close Vinita's clinic. This news was also a shock given that recent Eastern Oklahoma VA health leases indicated the Vinita VA Clinic lease would be renewed on October 1, 2021, and was not set to expire until September 30, 2030. Furthermore, we were concerned to hear the VA did not reach out to tribal and community leaders prior to the decision. Predictably, this lack of consultation has stirred significant pushback on the clinic's closure and raised further questions on VA's decision-making process. It is also odd that the issues with contracting rules—which were cited as key reasons for the closure—were not communicated sooner. Given the rapidity and lack of transparency of VA's handling of the clinic closure decision, we hope you will agree that further clarification is in order.

The VA should explain its decision-making process and why it believes Oklahoma's veterans are best served by relocating services to a new location. Since closing the Vinita VA Clinic and transitioning to Claremore would force changes on veterans who have greatly benefited from this location and measurably increase many veterans' drive time to receive healthcare, we urge you to fully consider the negative repercussions of this move on Oklahoma's veterans.

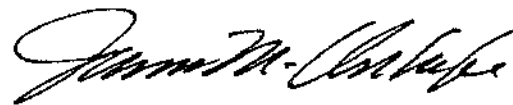
With these considerations in mind, we respectfully request answers on how the decision to close the Vinita VA Clinic was reached, a detailed explanation and timeline of the solicitation process, your future plans for the clinic, and your consideration of a potential re-bid. By reposting the solicitation and raising community awareness of the clinic's potential departure, VA only stands to gain and may encounter suitable alternatives that better serve veterans in northeastern Oklahoma.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

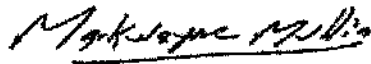
Sincerely,



James Lankford
United States Senator



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



Markwayne Mullin
Member of Congress