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September 6, 2016

The Honorable Jeff Miller  
Chairman  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
345 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Miller:

On behalf of the over 3,000 members of the Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA), we would like to offer our thoughts regarding the Commission on Care Final report being discussed before your Committee today.

NOVA thanks the Commissioners for their hard work and believes many of the recommendations offered will improve the care we provide veterans every day at VA facilities around the country. Recommendations to include providing additional resources to modernize IT, increase HR and other support staff, strengthen capital assets and recruit and retain a high quality professional workforce, all have our support.

The most glaring recommendation - and one that has received strong opposition from veterans' advocates and those in the community working to care for veterans - is a proposal that would create a VHA Independent Board which would govern the VA health care system.

NOVA strongly opposes giving an outside board - made up of civilian health care executives who may have never set foot into a VA facility - the authority to make decisions about the care and services provided America's veterans. Creating another layer of bureaucracy, which would take VA's ability to manage care away from those who are held accountable by this very body seems ill-advised. Oversight for veterans' health care handed over to a newly created external board would all but dismantle the most effective and innovative features of the current VA system - the Primary Care/Mental Health Integrated approach. It also fails to take into account the many wrap around services that VA offers veterans, while ironically recognizing that VA provides better coordinated care than any of its private sector partners.

NOVA agrees in order to reform VA so it can best serve our nation's veterans, we must expand access to services that it currently provides by hiring at VA facilities where demand exceeds available staffing, where geographic challenges exist, and specific services are not offered, allowing veterans the option of using purchased care available through its community providers.

Community providers should be a crucial part of the integrated network of care, but VA must remain the first point of access and coordinator of all care. As nurses, managing workflow and coordinating care is key to providing the quality that serves as a model for VA's "whole health" approach to care.

NOVA asks that any discussion regarding the Commission's proposed recommendations to improve gaps in service be made in a thoughtful, transparent process and involve all stakeholders. Preserving an integrated health care community designed to put veterans first must include VA. It is VA care that veterans overwhelmingly prefer and deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sharon A. Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "S" and "J".

Sharon Johnson, MSN, RN, President  
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs