

Testimony before Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Chairman: Phil Roe

Ranking Member: Tim Walz

I would first like to thank Chairman Roe, Ranking Member Walz and the members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee for providing me the opportunity to testify in support of the Veterans of the 22nd District of New York.

I testify today out of concern for the well-being and care of the Veterans that I represent. Recently, it's come to my attention that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is planning to move the Bainbridge Community Based Outpatient Clinic from its current location in Bainbridge over 30 miles away to Oneonta. For many, this may not seem like a substantial move, but for our aging veterans who already struggle with limited access to reliable public transportation this move would have devastating effects.

Bainbridge is a rural community in Chenango County that is home to over 3,600 veterans. Many veterans who reside region are elderly and earn incomes below the national average. As such, my veteran constituents often lack proper access to medical care and transportation. Moving the outpatient clinic from Bainbridge to Oneonta would cause undue financial and emotional stress to the veterans who rely on the Community Based Outpatient Clinic for the care they desperately need.

In March, I wrote to the Interim Medical Center Director of the Albany Stratton VA Medical Center to express the grave concerns that many of my constituents have expressed regarding this potential move. The response that I received from the VA was cordial, but contained a troubling lack of regard for Bainbridge area veterans and no concrete answers as to what the future of their care might entail.

My office has been contacted by many veterans who have raised concerns over the future of their medical care and the possibility that the Bainbridge outpatient clinic will be moved. Veterans, local elected officials and concerned members of the community alike, have all expressed that this move comes with little to no input from local stakeholders. In a letter sent to my office on March 15, one such veteran, Pamela Barton, expressed seven distinct reasons why such a move would negatively affect her and her fellow veterans. This letter is included here for the official record.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, our nation owes our veterans and their families a strong debt of gratitude for their selfless service and it is incumbent upon us to ensure that this VA facility is not moved to the detriment of the local veteran population. I urge the committee to consider these veterans and their families, reflect on the sacrifices that they have made on our behalf, and reject any move that will imperil their access to the quality care that they deserve.