

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Senate Republican Veterans Oppose VA Clinic Closures

SANTA FE – In recent weeks, the federal Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission recommended the closure of four Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) in New Mexico (Española, Gallup, Las Vegas, and Raton) and the relocation of the Rio Rancho CBOC to Albuquerque. The clinics primarily serve rural communities all over the state and provide valuable outpatient primary care services to veterans who live far from the VA hospital.

In a letter sent to the U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Senate Republican Leader, **Senator Greg Baca** (U.S. Navy Veteran), Senate Republican Whip, **Senator Craig Brandt** (U.S. Air Force Veteran) and **Senator William Sharer** (U.S. Army Veteran) urged the Secretary to reject the AIR Commission’s recommendations to close and relocate New Mexico COBCs.

“The value that these community based clinics bring to rural veterans in New Mexico is irreplaceable,” said Senator Baca. “We must be willing to serve our veterans in their communities, especially in a state as geographically large as ours. They should not have to drive hours upon end to seek the care they earned and deserve.”

“New Mexico is in the midst of a health care crisis and we simply do not have the resources to absorb those veterans who may lose vital services as a result of these closures and relocations,” added Senator Brandt. “The relocation of the Rio Rancho CBOC would impact me directly as a disabled veteran, but I am much more concerned about our rural veterans up north who live hours from the VA hospital in Albuquerque.”

If the VA moves forward with the Air Commission’s recommendations, the CBOCs could shut their doors as early as 2023.

The letter is attached.

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New Mexico State Senate

STATE CAPITOL

Santa Fe 87501

April 27, 2022

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

Sent via email to Denis.McDonough@va.gov

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We, the undersigned New Mexico State Senators and veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, are writing to express our strong opposition to the Asset and Infrastructure Review (“AIR”) Commission’s recommended closure and relocation of several Community Based Outpatient Clinics (“CBOC”) in New Mexico.

In a state as geographically large and diverse as New Mexico, access to localized health care is vital, especially for our veterans living in rural parts of the state. Since their inception, CBOCs have provided accessible outpatient primary care to veterans who would otherwise have to travel long distances to receive care at the Department of Veterans Affairs (“VA”) hospitals. In the wake of the pandemic and given the potential long-term impacts of COVID-19 on health care, it is unconscionable that the VA would even consider such drastic measures at this time. New Mexico is already facing a health care worker shortage and we lack the resources to compensate for the loss of services resulting from CBOC closures and relocations.

As previously noted by members of our congressional delegation, the AIR Commission relied on faulty, outdated information that does not reflect the health care crisis in New Mexico or take into consideration the strain that would be placed on other VA clinics and rural providers. We, therefore, urge you to reject their recommendations so that our veterans can continue to receive the health care services they deserve.

Thank you for your consideration of this pressing matter.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Gregory A. Baca in black ink.

GREGORY A. BACA
State Senator
Senate Republican Leader
Veteran, U.S. Navy

Handwritten signature of Craig W. Brandt in black ink.

CRAIG W. BRANDT
State Senator
Senate Republican Whip
Veteran, U.S. Air Force

Handwritten signature of William E. Sharer in black ink.

WILLIAM E. SHARER
State Senator
Veteran, U.S. Army