

JONI K. ERNST
IOWA

VICE CHAIRMAN,
SENATE REPUBLICAN CONFERENCE

WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE
730 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
PHONE: 202-224-3254
FAX: 202-224-9369

WWW.ERNST.SENATE.GOV

United States Senate

COMMITTEES
ARMED SERVICES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION
AND FORESTRY
ENVIRONMENT
AND PUBLIC WORKS
JUDICIARY
SMALL BUSINESS
AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

December 16, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

As you know, it is one of my top priorities to improve processes at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to better ensure that our veterans receive the support and care they have earned and have been promised. Today, I am writing to inquire about how the VA may be able to further assist our veterans who may be facing financial strains due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you know, COVID-19 has presented many challenges to our veterans across the country, many of whom have faced isolation, medical concerns, and economic uncertainty. It is my understanding the VA made a decision in April 2020 to place monthly patient billing statements for veterans' health care costs on hold until December 31, 2020. More recently, the VA announced that these statements would remain on hold until January 2021. Notably, veterans were not required to opt in or to provide consent for these holds, and instead had their bills delayed automatically by the VA.

Veterans have now begun to receive notification of their statements for medical bills that accumulated over the eight-month hold period. While these statements do not require payment until 2021, many veterans who are receiving such statements have not experienced an improvement in their financial situations since April, and are simply not prepared to pay the accumulated charge. Additionally, I have heard concerns from veterans in Iowa who have not received information from the VA regarding what options may be available to those who are experiencing continued financial hardship.

In light of the direct impact this policy has on our veterans during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, I respectfully request that the VA further delay the payment hold for an additional six months, through July 2021. During these challenging times, I also urge your department to proactively notify veterans of payment plan options, or any other assistance that may be available to them, and ensure that all help call lines are fully staffed and operational.

I look forward to receiving your response. I remain deeply committed to working with you and your Department to ensure that all veterans in Iowa and across the country have access to quality care and services.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

DES MOINES OFFICE
733 FEDERAL BUILDING
210 WALNUT STREET
DES MOINES, IA 50309
PHONE: 515-284-4574
FAX: 515-284-4937

CEDAR RAPIDS OFFICE
111 SEVENTH AVENUE SE
SUITE 480
CEDAR RAPIDS, IA 52401
PHONE: 319-365-4504
FAX: 319-365-4683

DAVENPORT OFFICE
201 WEST SECOND STREET
SUITE 806
DAVENPORT, IA 52801
PHONE: 563-322-0677
FAX: 563-322-0854

SIoux CITY OFFICE
194 FEDERAL BUILDING
320 SIXTH STREET
SIoux CITY, IA 51101
PHONE: 712-252-1550
FAX: 712-252-1638

COUNCIL BLUFFS OFFICE
221 FEDERAL BUILDING
8 SOUTH SIXTH STREET
COUNCIL BLUFFS, IA 51501
PHONE: 712-352-1167
FAX: 712-352-0087