



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

April 22, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

I write in strong support for the Governor of New Jersey's request for additional Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) assistance for all long-term care facilities in dire need across New Jersey, especially the State Veterans Homes. I understand that Governor Murphy has submitted this request through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and I urge the VA in the strongest possible terms to provide any and all available resources in support of this request. New Jersey desperately needs federal assistance to help disinfect facilities, administer testing, assist with patient care for remaining residents, and perform specific services at these disaster-stricken homes.

As you know, nationwide, more than 7,000 people have died in nursing homes and long-term care facilities due to COVID-19. There are 438 long-term care facilities in New Jersey with COVID-19, a total of 11,608 cases reported in these facilities overall, and a tragic 2,050 deaths. This includes nursing homes like Andover Subacute and Rehabilitation Center in Andover, N.J. - one of the largest homes in the State -- where at least 91 residents and staff have recently died, 39 of whom were confirmed positive for COVID-19. As of this week, 91 total residents had tested positive for coronavirus, 16 residents were awaiting test results, and 30 residents had been hospitalized. That is why I have called on the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) to assist dozens of other long-term care facilities facing critical shortages in North Jersey, asked FEMA to deploy the National Guard and Reserves, and led a bipartisan group of members of New Jersey's Congressional delegation to request that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) deploy U.S. Public Health Service front-line health care workers, and provide additional PPE resources from the Strategic National Stockpile. There are 680 National Guardsmen currently serving on duty in New Jersey as part of our State's COVID-19 response, including 45 National Guard medics assisting at the New Jersey Veterans Home at Paramus and 35 at the Veterans Home at Menlo Park.

Congressman Pascrell and I remain deeply concerned about the recent performance of the facility and a departure from its regular health and safety standards. As soon as we received reports about the outbreak of COVID-19, which led to more than eight deaths at the New Jersey Veterans Home at Paramus, operated by the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (NJ DMVA), I investigated and demanded that the NJ DMVA take immediate measures to protect veterans and correct

the failure to keep families informed about the risk to their health. Congressman Bill Pascrell and I wrote to you on April 10th to request that the VA deploy healthcare providers, staff, and resources there to help protect veterans and residents from COVID-19. I appreciate the VA's ongoing support for our State, including opening 20 beds to non-Veterans in New Jersey on April 1 to assist with COVID-19 patients pursuant to another FEMA mission assignment, and providing more than 50 VA nursing personnel already on-site and two-dozen more soon expected at the New Jersey Veterans Homes at Paramus and at Menlo Park.

Our State is relying on the federal government for assistance in dealing with this crisis, and I believe that the VA is uniquely equipped to help. That is why I respectfully request your immediate assistance. I am committed to doing everything I can to leverage federal resources to help protect vulnerable residents and staff members at New Jersey's long-term care facilities. We must do everything we can to save lives, protect public health and safety, and assist our State's most vulnerable residents, particularly our veterans who sacrificed so much to protect our democracy.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Gottheimer". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Josh Gottheimer  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS