

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) decision to deny the request made by the State of New Jersey for additional medical personnel needed to combat the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, at our State's long-term care facilities.

We are facing a crisis at more than 500 of New Jersey's long-term care facilities with COVID cases.<sup>1</sup> As of writing, New Jersey has 514 long-term care facilities with outbreaks of COVID-19, 24,874 total cases at nursing homes, with a tragic 4,691 reported deaths.

Given these startling numbers, we respectfully request a justification for why New Jersey's request for VA medical assistance at long-term care facilities was not granted on the merits. If the VA was unable to fulfill the request due to staffing limitations, please also explain why similar requests for support made by other states were apparently not subject to these limitations. According to public reports, the VA has provided up to fifteen teams to assist Florida's nursing homes through at least May 21.<sup>2</sup> New Jersey, a state of less than 9 million people, is one of the hardest hit states in the nation, with 135,454 total positive cases, and a tragic 8,952 deaths. Florida, a state with more than 21 million people, currently has 39,199 total cases, and 1,669 deaths.

As the state must now look elsewhere for additional support for staffing assistance at other long-term care facilities, we also urge the VA to continue to work with the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to increase and expand staffing to help deal with the worsening situation at the state-run veterans homes, including the disaster-stricken homes in Paramus and Menlo Park.

While we are disappointed that New Jersey's request was not granted, we remain committed to working with our federal agencies to free up resources and identify potential sources of support

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<sup>1</sup> *NJ.com*, "State reports jump in coronavirus cases, deaths at N.J.'s long-term care facilities," available at: <https://www.nj.com/coronavirus/2020/04/state-reports-jump-in-coronavirus-cases-deaths-at-njs-long-term-care-facilities.html>

<sup>2</sup> *Miami Herald*, "Florida asks VA for medical help at nursing homes that have lost staffers to COVID-19," available at: <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/article242183366.html>

for our state's most vulnerable residents at long-term care facilities. Thank you, and we look forward to receiving your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



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Josh Gottheimer  
Member of Congress



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Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Member of Congress



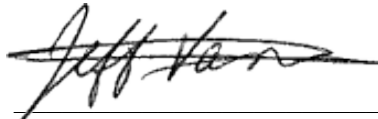
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Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress



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Tom Malinowski  
Member of Congress



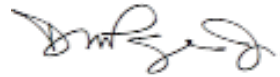
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Jefferson Van Drew  
Member of Congress



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Bill Pascrell, Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Donald M. Payne, Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Andy Kim  
Member of Congress



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Mikie Sherrill  
Member of Congress