June 19, 2014

The Honorable Sloan Gibson
Acting Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Acting Secretary Gibson:

We are writing to urge you to release the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Provider Agreement final rule RIN 2900-A015, issued on February 13, 2013, to allow for the use of alternative procedures to enter into provider agreements for extended care services. While the proposed rule was released well over a year ago in February of 2013, expanding veteran access to extended care services from local providers could not come at a better time. Veterans who need these extended care services, such as nursing home care, deserve to have access to this critical medical care as close as possible to their family, friends, and communities.

Under the VA Provider Agreement, the VA would be authorized to enter into agreements with certain additional long-term service and support providers, expanding the number of providers available to veterans. As a result, veterans will be able to access quality health care providers who are eager to participate in the VA system. In addition, these providers will expand options for veterans who desire care closer to their homes and other veteran resources in their communities. The range of providers covered by this agreement—including nursing center care, geriatric evaluation, domiciliary services, adult day health care, respite care, palliative care, hospice-care, and home health care—represents the diversity of providers needed to care for our nation’s veterans.

In the release of the final rule, we believe it’s also essential for VA to meet its obligation to our veterans by assessing and maintaining quality standards. The VA Provider Agreement must ensure that our veterans will have access to quality health care regardless of where they live, and we urge you to release the final VA Provider Agreement rule as soon as possible. If you have further questions on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]
Mazie K. Hirono
Heidi Heitkamp
Jeanne Shaheen
Bill Nelson
Tanya Baldwin
Brian Schatz
Michael O'Mara Red
Mary Stansard
John Cornyn
Claire Kim
Ron Johnson
Mitch McConnell