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SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

January 12, 2012

The Honorable Eric Shinseki
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave
Washington, DC 20420-0001

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

I write to express my concerns regarding the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) decision to relocate its current Drop-In Day Treatment Center for veterans in Little Rock. I request that you suspend the VA's plan to relocate this center until you have had the opportunity to work with the Little Rock community to identify the best and most appropriate area for relocation.

As an Iraq War veteran myself, I believe, like you, that this country has no greater obligation than to take care of our nation's veterans and make good on the promises made to them. My staff and I work diligently to assist veterans who have sacrificed so much for this country. We must work together to ensure that the Drop-In Day Treatment Center relocation serves the best interest of our veterans.

It has come to my attention that the VA has planned to relocate their Drop-In Day Treatment Center from its current location at 1101 West Second Street in Little Rock, to 10th and Main Street in Little Rock. Many of my constituents have expressed concerns over the fact that this relocation site is directly across the street from a liquor store and that the VA received no input from local residents, government officials, or community leaders before deciding on this location. This proposed location across the street from the liquor store is particularly troubling because a number of our homeless veterans struggle with alcohol addiction. I believe this is a perfect example of where the federal government should have consulted proactively with local residents, government officials, and community leaders on a local issue but did not.

While the VA's desire to relocate the Drop-In Day Treatment Center was generally known by the community for years, the VA was less than forthcoming about their interest in locating the Drop-In Day Treatment Center at the proposed location on Main Street. Specifically, the office of Little Rock Mayor Mark Stodola, including the Mayor's Homeless Services Coordinator, has expressed concern that the VA never discussed the relocation to Main Street with them. The Mayor's Homeless Services Coordinator stated that when he mentioned the proposed location to a VA official, the official expressed surprise that the Coordinator had this information.

VA officials have informed me that federal regulations prohibited them from sharing any information regarding the specific Main Street location after the solicitation for offer was issued. A system that purportedly prohibits federal officials from communicating and working with local stakeholders regarding a potential lease location strikes me as counterproductive and in need of revision. Further, the VA awarded the contract on November 1, 2011, but did not inform local residents, government officials, or community leaders until early January – two months later. I request that you provide me with the VA's policy and procedures for the relocation selection process and specifically any statutes, regulations, or policies that prevent the VA from seeking public input during the selection process.

Mayor Stodola himself has expressed to me his opposition to this particular site for the relocation of the Drop-In Day Treatment Center and has proposed an alternate location. He and local government officials are currently spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to renovate a homeless shelter on Confederate Boulevard, and they have suggested that the VA use this site for the relocation of their Drop-In Day Treatment Center. According to the Mayor, this location will allow for transportation in and around the city, as it is located on a bus route, and it will provide a number of amenities to our homeless veterans. In addition to the Mayor's suggested alternate location, there may be other locations that merit consideration. I believe that the most appropriate and best location could be identified with input from local residents, government officials, and community leaders in Little Rock, and I urge you to suspend the relocation of the Drop-In Day Treatment Center so that the VA can consult adequately with local stakeholders.

I would appreciate a response from your office before a final decision on the relocation site is made. You can contact me on my personal cell phone at (501) 837-5190. My office contact for this issue is Peter Comstock, and he may be reached at (202) 226-8497 or Peter.Comstock@mail.house.gov. Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

Tim Griffin
Member of Congress