



**American Hospital  
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July 28, 2015

The Honorable David Jolly  
United States House of Representatives  
1728 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Jolly:

On behalf of our nearly 5,000 member hospitals, health systems and other health care organizations, and our 43,000 individual members, the American Hospital Association (AHA) is pleased to express our support for your legislation, H.R. 3183, the Veterans Health Care Freedom Act, which makes significant improvements to the Veterans Choice Program.

The Veterans Choice Program is a new, temporary benefit allowing some veterans to receive health care from non-Veterans Administration (VA) health care providers rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility. It was authorized under the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 and provides \$10 billion for non-VA medical care to eligible veterans until the required end date of Aug. 7, 2017.

The AHA has been working with our member hospitals and health systems to ensure the success of the Veterans Choice Program. The program has become an important access point for eligible veterans, who are using it to access medically necessary care through non-VA hospitals. Hospitals and health systems providing care for veterans in their communities through the program have invested resources to execute contracts and ensure veterans have access to care. However, our members, as well as veterans, have faced many roadblocks when attempting to provide and access care under the program. These roadblocks have resulted in a very small number of veterans being able to access the program. We believe that impediments preventing veterans from using the Veterans Choice Program should be eliminated and that those who will use it in the future should have continuity of care beyond its termination date in 2017.

Your bill ensures that our nation's veterans will be able to more easily seek care outside the VA health system by making the Veterans Choice Program permanent. Further, your bill eliminates impediments to accessing care and creates a true "choice card" by enabling veterans to obtain hospital care and medical services at non-VA health providers regardless of their proximity to, or wait times at a Veterans Health Administration facility. In addition, your bill requires the VA Secretary to report to Congress annually on the changes in patient load per VA facility and to make recommendation for budgetary adjustments to those facilities based on patient load.



The Honorable David Jolly

July 28, 2015

Page Two

The goal of every hospital in America, including VA hospitals, is to ensure patients get the right care at the right time, in the right setting. For decades, the VA has been there for our veterans in times of need, and it does extraordinary work under very challenging circumstances for a growing and complex patient population. The nation's hospitals have a long-standing history of collaboration with the VA and stand ready to assist them, and our veterans, in any way they can.

Again, we are pleased to support H.R. 3183, the Veterans Health Care Freedom Act and appreciate your continued leadership to improve veterans' health care. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to achieve passage of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Thomas Nickels  
Senior Vice President