

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 18, 2006

Boston Study  
VA CARES Studies  
P.O. Box 1427  
Washington Grove, MD 20880-1427

Dear Committee Members:

We write to express our concern with the options proposed for further review in Stage II of the Boston area Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) study. Clearly, modernizing the VA's health care delivery system, as the CARES process seeks to do, is an important and necessary pursuit. We believe, however, it must be accomplished in a way that further enhances the accessibility and quality of care we provide to our veterans. At this time, we continue to harbor serious reservations about whether the process will lead to an outcome where the needs of current and future veterans in Massachusetts will be fully met.

Although in 2004 the CARES Commission's final report and then-VA Secretary Anthony Principi rejected the idea of removing inpatient services from the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial VA Medical Center in Bedford, the Stage II options regrettably resurrect this misguided proposal. As you may know, Bedford provides indispensable services to veterans throughout New England. One of their most successful and unique programs is the Geriatrics Research Education and Clinical Center (GRECC), which is the nation's premier center for veterans suffering from Alzheimer's disease. It would simply be impossible to recreate this unique and vital program in a different hospital.

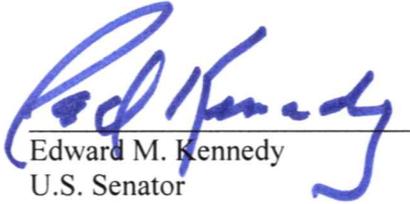
Consolidating Bedford's inpatient and residential clinical services on to the Brockton campus would put at jeopardy other programs. For instance, if Bedford's innovative and effective rehabilitation programs were transferred elsewhere, veterans would be forced to go to other facilities in the region when they already may travel significant distances to get to Bedford. Such a consolidation would likely impose a great strain on Brockton. Asking any VA facility to absorb additional patients and still sustain the same level of quality care is not feasible or fair.

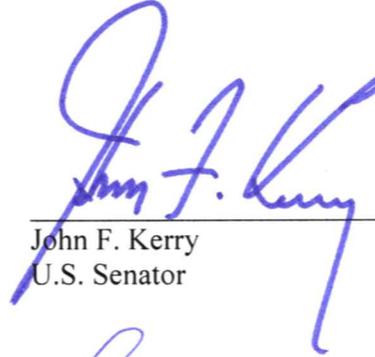
Furthermore, the Stage II options propose the consolidation of services at the VA facilities in Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury. Each of these campuses is unique and provides nationally recognized services to our veterans. For instance, the West Roxbury facility is nationally known as a center of excellence for spinal cord injuries and cardiothoracic surgery. Jamaica Plain is home to a branch of the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that includes cutting-edge investigation of the effects of PTSD on women. Moreover, we are concerned about the potential reduction of services at one or both of these facilities as well as the disruption to veterans, their families and those who work at these campuses.

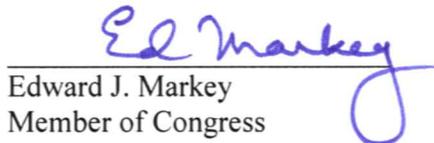
It also appears that these Stage II options assume the Causeway Street Outpatient Clinic will be closed in 2006 despite the fact legislation was approved to ensure the Clinic would remain open at least until the CARES process was completed. We believe a full assessment of the VA facilities in the Boston region means including the Causeway Street Outpatient Clinic.

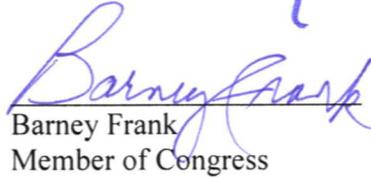
With soldiers returning home every day from Iraq and Afghanistan, we believe now is the wrong time to assume improved overall care can be provided to our veterans by limiting their options of obtaining services. As such, we cannot support any of the Stage II options that will not verifiably enhance the quality of care veterans currently receive in Massachusetts and we respectfully request that you do the same.

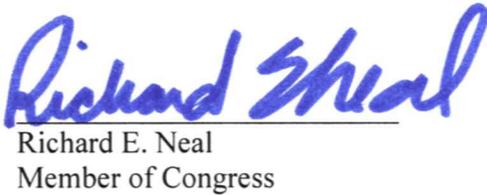
Sincerely,

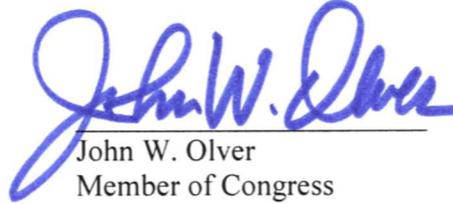
  
Edward M. Kennedy  
U.S. Senator

  
John F. Kerry  
U.S. Senator

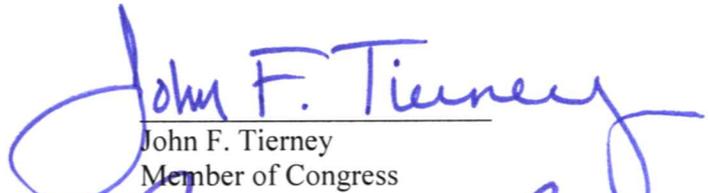
  
Edward J. Markey  
Member of Congress

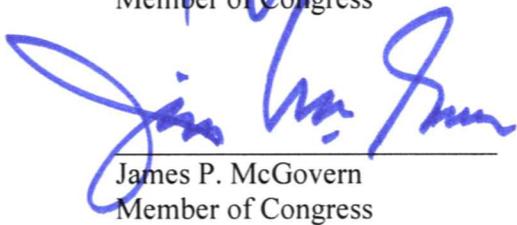
  
Barney Frank  
Member of Congress

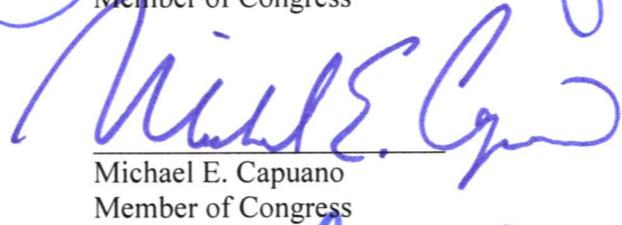
  
Richard E. Neal  
Member of Congress

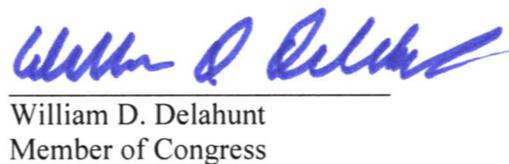
  
John W. Olver  
Member of Congress

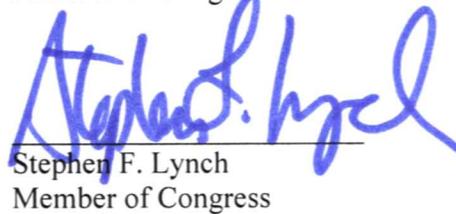
  
Martin T. Meehan  
Member of Congress

  
John F. Tierney  
Member of Congress

  
James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

  
Michael E. Capuano  
Member of Congress

  
William D. Delahunt  
Member of Congress

  
Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress