



September 25, 2020

Director Ann Brown  
Atlanta VA Healthcare System  
1670 Clairmont Road  
Decatur, Georgia 30033

Dear Director Brown,

Thank you for your strong partnership in serving Georgia's veterans. As Americans, we have a responsibility to uphold the commitments we made to our veterans, and it is a job that I take very seriously. Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been made aware of several long-standing issues within the Atlanta VA Healthcare System (AVAHCS) that have been exacerbated due to the public health crisis. I am writing today to both make you aware of the concerns of my constituents and to seek continued partnership with you in solving these issues.

First, I was pleased to hear that many of these issues are already being addressed. I want to thank you for addressing the phone system and the telehealth delivery system. Many of my constituents have expressed concerns about these two items. Please keep me informed about the progress of these improvements.

In an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, healthcare facilities across the country temporarily paused elective surgeries and procedures. On April 20, 2020, Governor Kemp issued an Executive Order allowing for these facilities to resume operations in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) guidelines<sup>[1]</sup>. Despite this guidance, the AVAHCS is continuing to operate in a limited capacity. I completely understand the need to protect VA health care providers and staff in the face of this health risk. However, I am concerned about the impact of the current AVAHCS operating status on veterans in the community. This delay of care, coupled with the partial shutdown that took place last year, has the potential to devastate veteran health outcomes for years to come. Any plans to resume operations should also include a concerted effort to minimize wait times and ensure that veterans are not falling through the cracks.

Another devastating impact of this pandemic has been its disproportionate impact on our elderly. Your strong and swift action in the beginning of the pandemic led to minimal spread of COVID-19 in the Atlanta VA Community Living Center (CLC), and I thank you for your efforts in protecting our veterans from the virus. However, many of these veterans have been displaced from the Atlanta VA CLC for months, far from family and the facility that they chose to receive their care. These families deserve answers and transparency. While I understand that the Veterans Health Administration's Community Living Centers Rating System has room for

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://gov.georgia.gov/executive-action/executive-orders/2020-executive-orders>

improvement<sup>[2]</sup>, the Eagle's Nest CLC's current rating 2-star rating, coupled with the prolonged relocation of its residents, is disconcerting. Those men and women who fought bravely to protect our country deserve to live and be cared for in a safe environment, especially in their final years. I request that you provide my office with your plan to improve conditions for elderly veterans that receive care at the Atlanta VA CLC and return residents to the facility.

Further, I am deeply concerned about access to health care for female veterans. According to the Census Bureau, Georgia's female veteran population is 30% higher than the national percentage of female veterans across the country<sup>[3]</sup>. Female veterans report higher rates of arthritis, cancer, cardiovascular disease, COPD, and mental illness than their counterparts without military experience<sup>[4]</sup>, and one in four female veterans who receive medical care at a VA facility screen positive for military sexual trauma<sup>[5]</sup> (MST). Several female veterans in our state have reported difficulty scheduling mammogram appointments at the Atlanta VA Medical Center, and shared that they have difficulty receiving compassionate care for MST within the Atlanta VA. I urge you to keep these brave women in mind as you lead the AVAHCS through this pandemic and beyond.

Our current situation has been detrimental for healthcare delivery systems across the country. I have visited non-VA hospitals and seen the ways the private sector has pivoted to provide healthcare despite the challenges of COVID-19. At the heart, my goal is to ensure that the AVAHCS is provided with the tools they need to ensure veterans get benefits they earned. As both of us work to solve these issues, I would like to maintain communication with you and your team.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. I look forward to further discussions about how to improve the healthcare experience for America's veterans.

Sincerely,



David A. Perdue  
United States Senator

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<sup>[2]</sup> <https://www.va.gov/oig/pubs/VAOIG-18-05113-81.pdf>

<sup>[3]</sup> <https://www2.census.gov/library/visualizations/2015/comm/vets/ga-vets.pdf>

<sup>[4]</sup> [https://assets.americashealthrankings.org/app/uploads/ahr\\_hwwhs\\_2017\\_executive\\_summary\\_102017a.pdf](https://assets.americashealthrankings.org/app/uploads/ahr_hwwhs_2017_executive_summary_102017a.pdf)

<sup>[5]</sup> <https://www.protectourdefenders.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/NEW-MSA-Fact-Sheet-v1.pdf>