

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 15, 2024

Mr. Bryan C. Matthews
Director
Phoenix VA Health Care System
Carl T. Hayden Veterans' Administration Medical Center
650 East Indian School Road
Phoenix, AZ 85012

Director Matthews,

We are deeply concerned about the significant discrepancies in information provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and local VA facilities regarding the availability of healthcare resources for our veterans. Conflicting statements are being given to veterans and VA caseworkers in Arizona about the budget, referrals to community care, and a hiring freeze affecting timely appointments.

On July 15, the VA informed the House Committee on Veterans Affairs that there would be an estimated \$2.88 billion shortfall for FY 2024 in addition to \$11.97 billion in FY 2025¹. This projected shortfall raises significant concerns about the department's ability to maintain the funding necessary to provide healthcare services to veterans, especially at a time where the VA has made a push to reduce the number of veterans referred to community care.

At a July 19 meeting between you and Arizona congressional staff, delegation staff noted that constituents report that Veterans Health Administration (VHA) representatives have been telling veterans the VHA is out of money for community care. However, you told delegation staff there is money for community care and the information being given is incorrect but declined to provide accounting information to disprove these claims. In light of the VA's July 15 report, these contradictory statements are extremely problematic. Please provide the following information by September 3, 2024:

1. Were you aware of the funding shortfall before the July 19 meeting with Arizona congressional staff? On what date were you informed of the shortfall?
2. How does the shortfall specifically affect services provided to veterans at the Phoenix VA?
3. Details of the communication between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Phoenix VA concerning the anticipated budget shortfall for FY 2024 and FY 2025.
4. Provide details of the current budget allocation for community care referrals at the Phoenix VA.

¹ Aidan Quigley, *Massive veterans budget gap rips hole in appropriations process*, Roll Call (2024), <https://rollcall.com/2024/07/26/massive-veterans-budget-gap-rips-hole-in-appropriations-process/>

5. Information on how the VA planned to communicate this anticipated budget shortfall to veterans seeking healthcare.
6. Plans on how the VA is going to ensure transparent and reliable communication between the Department of Veterans Affairs, local VA facilities, and veterans seeking healthcare.
7. What assurances can you provide that veterans will not face similar issues moving forward, especially concerning community care and timely appointments?

This current situation not only undermines the trust veterans have in the VA system but also jeopardizes their access to healthcare. We look forward to your prompt response to these critical issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andy Biggs".

Andy Biggs
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul A. Gosar".

Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Eli Crane".

Eli Crane
Member of Congress