



STATE OF WASHINGTON
Office of the Governor

September 24, 2014

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The task before you is daunting, and I want to thank you for your willingness to accept the challenge of improving service to our veterans and guiding the VA through the years ahead. Your task will not be easy, but I am confident of your dedication and determination. Providing the best possible environment for veterans to live, work and raise families has been and continues to be a priority for my administration. In that regard, we have accomplished some great things in Washington State, and I respectfully ask for your assistance in accomplishing the next phase.

As our nation winds down from prolonged military engagement overseas and the Department of Defense executes force structure cuts, it is more important than ever that we maximize opportunities for transitioning veterans to seamlessly enter into civilian life. Within Washington State, we have created the Washington State Military Transition Council - an unprecedented public-private partnership that brings together federal, state and local agencies with the sole mission of increasing successful transition from military service into employment, education or apprenticeships, or entrepreneurship. This collaboration has already increased transitioning veteran employment rates by 20 percent at our state's largest military installation. In order to maximize the power of this partnership, we need better access to data from the federal government to help us see "upstream" to know how many service members are transitioning and how we can best help them. Your support for increased data sharing between federal and state agencies to support transitioning service members would prove invaluable.

In Washington State, we have launched a Veterans Benefit Enhancement program that has successfully helped veterans who are enrolled in Medicaid understand and take advantage of the richer federal benefits they have earned in their service to our country. The Health Care Authority program, in partnership with the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has improved health care services for more than 15,000 veterans and their dependents. The program was awarded the VA's initial "Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence" award at a White House ceremony in February. It is my hope that you will give serious consideration to helping establish this same enhancement initiative in other states across the country.

Additionally, progress continues on the Walla Walla Veterans Home. Located on the campus of the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center, this new 80 bed small house design facility will bring the services of a State Veterans Home to southeastern Washington. We are encouraged by your commitment of \$22 million through the Veterans Affairs State Home Construction Grant Program that will complement our state appropriation of \$12 million for this project; however, the missing piece is the necessary federal-to-state land transfer, on which we would appreciate your office's direct engagement. If there are any unanswered questions, concerns or unaddressed obstacles on our side, the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs leadership stands ready to assist in any way they are able. We continue to plan for an anticipated groundbreaking in the spring of 2015. Through our collective efforts, we can enhance the well-being of some of our most vulnerable veterans.

Finally, it is an honor to be invited to participate in the Servicemember for Life Summit at Joint Base Lewis-McChord on October 21st. This is a moment where federal, senior military and state leadership can gather to discuss opportunities to increase collaboration and build interconnectivity that will enable the state of Washington to more effectively support our veterans. I look forward to meeting with representatives from your department, the Department of Defense and the Department of Labor, to exchange ideas on how to make this happen.

Our state is proud to be home to more than 600,000 veterans. We are deeply grateful for their service, as well as for your commitment to our veterans and this great nation.

Very truly yours,



Jay Inslee
Governor

cc: The Honorable Valerie Jarrett, Senior Advisor and Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement
The Honorable Koby Langley, Associate Director, White House Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs
Members of the Washington State Congressional Delegation
David Moore, Director, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices
Matt Salo, Executive Director, National Association of Medicaid Directors