

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 4, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, District of Columbia 20500-0003

Dear President Obama:

We write in opposition to a provision in the administration's fiscal year 2016 budget request that seeks to strip funding from the newly created Veterans Choice Card program. Congress created the Choice Card program on a strong bipartisan basis in response to the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) failures to ensure that veterans received timely and quality care, and we are deeply troubled that the administration is proposing to cut funding from this program only months into its implementation.

The waitlist manipulation scandal last year exposed widespread mismanagement at the VA that resulted in veterans being denied care. That is why Congress took action and passed the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-136), which created the Veterans Choice Card program in order to allow veterans to seek non-VA care. Congress also provided an additional \$5 billion for the VA to better serve veterans by hiring more doctors and nurses.

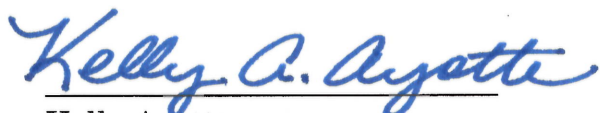
While the VA provides excellent care in many circumstances, it has also failed tens of thousands of veterans who were not even able to schedule an appointment. As such, it is troubling that the administration's fiscal year 2016 budget request seeks to reduce veterans' access to non-VA care by shifting funds out of the Choice Card program. As the budget request states, the law directed that this funding be deposited in the Veterans Choice Fund to be used to provide non-VA care to eligible veterans *at their election*. Reducing Choice Card resources available to veterans will narrow their options and reduce access to the care they seek. That is unacceptable and inconsistent with congressional intent.

We are concerned that this budget proposal is just the latest example of the administration's reluctance to implement the Choice Card program as Congress intended. We hear from New Hampshire veterans on a daily basis who are attempting to navigate the Choice Card program, but are unable to receive care because of misinformation and bureaucratic obstacles. We are disappointed that

the administration is attempting to cut funding from a program that was enacted with overwhelming bipartisan support and that has not yet been properly implemented.

The administration's proposal to defund the Veterans Choice Fund jeopardizes veterans' access to care and undermines the principle at the heart of the program—veterans' ability to choose where they receive care. We will oppose all efforts to reduce funding for this worthy program, and we urge the administration to follow through on its commitment to improve care for our veterans and fully implement the Choice Card program as Congress intended.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.



Kelly Ayotte
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator