RICHARD BURR
NORTH CAROLINA

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 15, 2015

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

Dear Secretary McDonald:

I write to convey my growing concerns regarding the lack of access to certain health care services that veterans are experiencing due to water safety problems at the Wilmington, North Carolina, VA Health Care Center (HCC). On March 19, 2015, the Cape Fear Public Utility Authority received a water quality complaint from the Wilmington HCC. The utility tested the water inside the clinic, determined there was an interior plumbing problem, and advised the HCC to stop using the water on March 23. The efforts to correct the water quality problems are now in their third month.

These water problems have forced the suspension of gastrointestinal, urology and dental procedures at the HCC. While VA says that it is referring patients requiring urgent care procedures to community providers at VA expense, I have heard from concerned veterans who tell me VA is not fully honoring its commitment to refer urgent care patients to community providers and that patients are, in some cases, being required to travel beyond forty miles to receive care at the Fayetteville VA Medical Center. I understand that Fayetteville's forty mile radius and Wilmington's overlap to some extent, but if this "overlap" is part of the reasoning for having veterans travel further for care which is available locally, it defies common sense and may also defy good medical sense.

I am requesting your department provide a briefing to my Washington DC staff before July 25, 2015, with data on the status of all delayed and rescheduled patient appointments at the Wilmington HCC, all urgent care referrals from the Wilmington HCC to community providers in the Wilmington area, and all urgent care referrals from the Wilmington HCC to the Fayetteville VA Medical Center since the reduction in services due to the water problems identified in March. As part of that briefing, I would also like to receive an update on what VA is doing to ensure work at the HCC continues without delay to bring the water to an acceptably safe standard that will permit resumption of all HCC services and how VA will relieve the backlog of appointments after full services resume.

Sincerely,

Richard Burr
United States Senator