

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 10, 2016

The Honorable Donald Trump  
President-Elect of the United States  
1717 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC, 20006

Dear President-elect Trump,

We are writing to urge you to exclude mission-critical employees at the Department of Veterans Affairs from your proposed 100-day civilian federal employee hiring freeze. You have said that the hiring freeze would not apply to personnel who work to ensure public safety and public health, so we are hopeful that you will agree that direct care providers and their necessary support staff at the Department of Veterans Affairs, who serve the critical health needs of veterans, meet that standard. Otherwise, we are concerned that a hiring freeze could leave critical roles, including positions at Vet Centers in Maine, vacant. This would limit the ability of those who served our Nation to receive the high-quality care they need and deserve.

In Maine, which has one of the highest number of veterans per capita in the United States, there are several critical staffing vacancies at Vet Centers, which provide a variety of critical social and psychological service to veterans. Due to the current staffing vacancies at Vet Centers in Caribou and Portland, veterans are not receiving the level and consistency of care they have earned through their service to our nation. While we have urged the Veterans Health Administration to take immediate action to fill these vacancies, we are concerned that if they remain unfilled during the transition to the new Administration, a hiring freeze would only continue to prevent veterans from receiving these vital services.

In your Ten Point Plan for the VA, you advocate for increased mental health care professionals. We deeply hope and urge you to keep the following mental health-related staffing inadequacies, and the needs of Maine Veterans, in mind as you evaluate the scope of your hiring freeze:

- Caribou, Maine: The Caribou Vet Center is tasked with serving the needs of Veterans throughout Aroostook County. While the Center is authorized to have five employees, it has had multiple vacancies for some time. This lack of availability of consistent counseling is a disservice to the Veterans in Northern Maine.

- Portland, Maine: The Portland Vet Center is authorized to have a staff of six, but currently has a staff of four and lacks administrative staff. As such, we understand that current staff may be covering their jobs addressing mental health needs, as well as taking on the additional responsibilities of basic administrative duties.

Again, we believe that a continuation of these vacancies due to a proposed federal civilian hiring freeze would not be in the best interests of Maine veterans, who served their country in uniform and deserve unencumbered access to the highest quality of care. We urge you to exclude the vital personnel at the Department of Veterans Affairs from the hiring freeze so that no veteran will be put at risk.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact us directly or have your staff contact William Ellis (King) at 202-224-5344 or Mike Wakefield (Collins) at 202-224-3913.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Angus King" followed by a horizontal line.

Senator Angus S. King, Jr.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan M. Collins".

Senator Susan M. Collins