

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 27, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins,

We write to you out of concern for ability of the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) to continue to provide critical support to veterans and their loved ones. Over the past month, the Department of Veterans Affairs has fired more than 2,400 federal employees, including dedicated health professionals who man the phones at VA's suicide crisis line. Moreover, employees that work at the Veterans Crisis Line who remain employed are facing uncertainty about their work status following the President's January 20<sup>th</sup> directive that all departments of the executive branch take steps to terminate remote work arrangements. We urge you to take immediate action to ensure the Veterans Crisis Line is not disrupted by layoffs or other executive orders, including by bringing these employees back to work and seeking exemptions to the termination of remote work arrangements.

The VCL is a dedicated hotline available to our nation's veterans for assistance in addressing acute mental health issues, particularly thoughts of attempting suicide. The VCL allows veterans to reach assistance through phone calls, text messages, or online chats. The responders fielding these requests for support are trained in evidence-based practices for crisis response and many of them are licensed mental health professionals. Many were hired as fully remote workers and now, the President's directive jeopardizes veterans' 24/7 access to this crisis care.

We understand that some employees have received deadlines for returning to agency facilities while others, such as those covered under bargaining units or those with official duty stations outside 50 miles of an agency facility, are awaiting further guidance. Now is the time for you to seek an exemption for VCL responders and to communicate this intent clearly to the workforce to prevent further uncertainty and avoid any disruptions to the crisis line's services.

As Members of Congress who championed the legislation to merge the Veterans Crisis Line with the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, thereby streamlining its use for veterans, we have followed its implementation closely. We note the disruptions and intermittent access issues that resulted in disconnected or dropped calls and chats in recent years, and we also note the

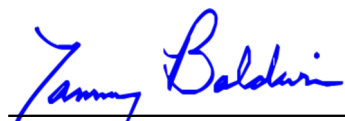
Department's ongoing efforts to work with the Office of Information and Technology as well as to comply with Inspector General recommendations to improve services for veterans. Disrupting the professionally-trained response workforce would not support the success of these ongoing improvement efforts.

The ease of use of this hotline has led to increasing usage, with the VCL reporting receipt of more than 2 million calls, texts, and chats answered since its transition to the 988 line. Due to the dedicated professional response workforce, the VCL reports an average wait time of 9 seconds. We cannot risk failing our nation's veterans by jeopardizing the continued function of this crisis support line.

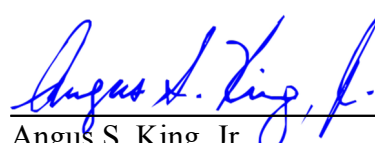
You affirmed during your confirmation process your commitment to addressing the epidemic of veteran suicide and to reaching at risk veterans. Risking the loss of access to immediate, life-saving mental health resources is not congruent with that promise.

This is a critical time to ensure the VCL has the operational environment to support its substantial call volume and to support our veterans and save lives. We look forward to your prompt attention to this matter and to your response.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



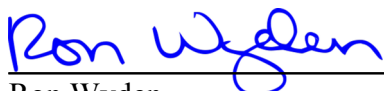
Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator




Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

  
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Ruben Gallego  
United States Senator

  
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Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

CC: Mr. Charles Ezell, Acting Director, Office of Personnel Management