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Congress of the United States
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May 5, 2006

Honorable James Nicholson
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington DC 20420

Dear Secretary Nicholson,

It is my understanding you are close to making a decision regarding the CARES Commission's recommendations for consolidation of the Brooklyn and Manhattan Veterans Hospitals.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my opposition to such consolidation. As we have heard from numerous veterans throughout the city, the nature and size of New York City make accessibility to VA facilities particularly problematic. Closure of either VA hospital will significantly threaten veterans' access to the quality health care they need and deserve. For the veterans in my district, traveling from Brooklyn or Staten Island to Manhattan is physically taxing, expensive and can take as long as two hours.

In fact, in the CARES Commission's Report to the Secretary, it states:

Many witnesses at the Bronx hearing testified about the difficulties of transportation in New York City, with a number of witnesses suggesting that transportation between the Manhattan and Brooklyn facilities would be very challenging and time consuming for veteran patients and nearly impossible for those veterans with disabilities that impact their mobility.

In addition, the Brooklyn VA has its own strengths that simply cannot be replicated at the Manhattan VA. In the areas of primary care, rehabilitative medicine, radiation/oncology and women's health services, the Brooklyn VA has been and will continue to be a leader in superior and cutting edge services. In addition, the Brooklyn VA's proximity to Fort Hamilton provides an invaluable link to our active duty soldiers, as well as quality health care for active duty personnel and their families.

As you give final consideration to the recommendations put forth for consolidation of the Brooklyn and Manhattan VA Hospitals, I wish to make clear that a decision to close or reduce services at either facility is not in the best interest of New York City's veterans.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vito Fossella". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vito Fossella
Member of Congress