

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0301

March 1, 2016

The Honorable Charlie Dent
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
HVC-227, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Dent and Ranking Member Bishop:

As you begin work on the fiscal year (FY) 2017 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies bill, we urge you meet the President's budget request for the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) and provide the BVA with the necessary resources to reduce the large backlog of appeals pending before the Veterans Benefits Administration.

The progress made by the VA to reduce the number of initial claims pending exceeding more than 125 days is commendable. The staggering 600,000 backlogged cases in the spring of 2013 has been reduced dramatically, dipping under 80,000 by the end of 2015. However, as this sustained emphasis on reducing the initial-claims backlog has greatly improved the number of these cases processed, the number of claims decisions now being appealed across the VA and the Board of Veterans Appeals has ballooned to over 400,000. The average wait time for these appeals has extended to nearly three years, with many cases stretching well beyond that.

Our veterans have performed a valiant service to our nation and it is our duty and obligation to ensure that they have timely access not only to their awarded benefits but also to the decision process associated with those benefits. As Congress and the VA work together to develop a more streamlined and less bureaucratic method to process and administer veterans' benefits, it is imperative that we provide the BVA with the resources necessary to quickly and efficiently process appeals and reduce the massive backlog of claims that have accumulated.

We understand the particularly challenging fiscal climate we face and the difficult funding decisions that must be made. Given the acute and timely nature of the challenge the appeals backlog presents to the Veterans Benefits Administration, we believe it should be a top priority in FY17. As a result, we support appropriations for the Board of Veterans Appeals at the

President's requested level and are grateful for the committee's efforts to improve care for our veterans.

We thank you for your consideration of this request, and for your leadership on the committee.

Sincerely,



Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Member of Congress



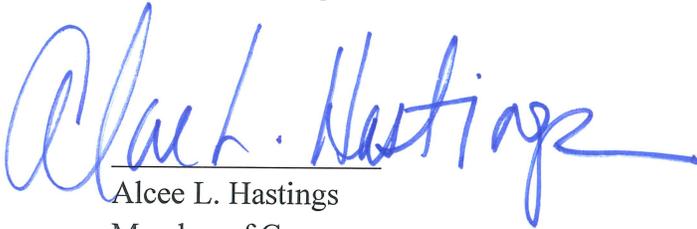
Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress



Ted Deutch
Member of Congress



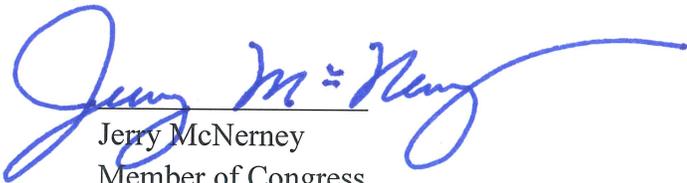
Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



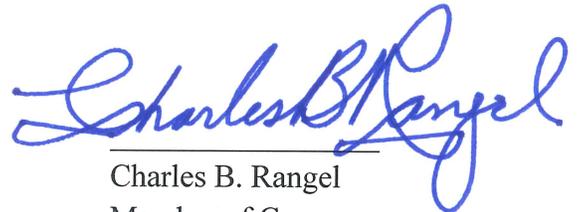
Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



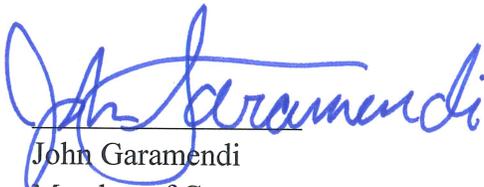
Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress



Charles B. Rangel
Member of Congress



John Garamendi
Member of Congress



Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



Ted Yoho
Member of Congress



Mark Takano
Member of Congress



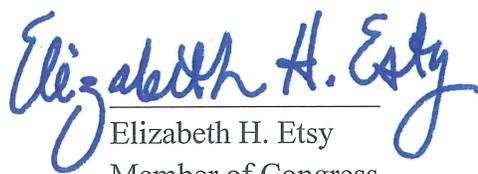
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



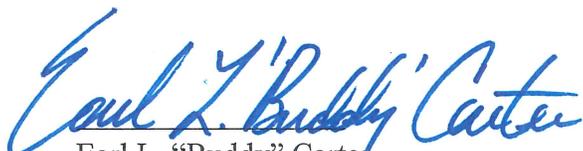
Al Green
Member of Congress



Lois Frankel
Member of Congress



Elizabeth H. Etsy
Member of Congress



Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress



Martha McSally
Member of Congress



Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress