

KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND
NEW YORK

RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
SUITE 478
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205
202-224-4451

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
APPROPRIATIONS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

March 27, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Collins,

I write to ask that you take immediate steps to reverse the damage caused to the provision of mental health care at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) due to the Trump Administration's return to office order, which has jeopardized the ability for veterans to receive quality and confidential care. I also ask that you work to reverse the impact of cuts to the VA led by Elon Musk's so-called 'Department of Government Efficiency' (DOGE) which has reduced the number of support staff. These cuts harm the VA's ability to provide care to some of the most vulnerable populations of veterans, including those in need of the VA's Veterans Crisis Line (VCL), and sow chaos and confusion among veterans in need of care and VA staff alike.

As you know, on January 20, 2025, the Trump Administration issued memoranda to all agency and department heads to 'terminate remote work arrangements,' allowing agencies and departments to make exemptions when necessary.¹ Public reporting has shown that this policy change has now forced psychiatrists and other mental health professionals at the VA back to crowded work stations, forcing them to carry out therapy and other mental health services for veterans without the guarantee of privacy for their patients, potentially in violation of professional mental health standards.^{2,3} This return to office order only increases the mental and emotional burden on veterans seeking care, who may require months or even years to develop a relationship with their mental health provider to privately discuss their conditions. Like any other patient, if our veterans feel that they cannot privately receive treatment, then they may withdraw from treatment altogether.

Further, inhibiting the ability for mental health providers to carry out their duty to veterans – and moving them to work stations miles away – will only hurt our ability to retain these providers at the expense of veterans in need of care. While the VA has made the correct decision in allowing VCL employees to continue remote work, Congress is also aware that cuts to probationary employees by

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/return-to-in-person-work/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/22/us/politics/veterans-affairs-mental-health-doge.html>

³ [https://www.apa.org/ethics/code#:~:text=\(b\)%20Psychologists%20disclose%20confidential%20information,%2Fpatient%2C%20psychologist%2C%20or%20others](https://www.apa.org/ethics/code#:~:text=(b)%20Psychologists%20disclose%20confidential%20information,%2Fpatient%2C%20psychologist%2C%20or%20others)

DOGE have led to the firing of some VCL staff tasked with responding to veterans suffering from a mental health crisis.⁴

These changes by the Administration and Elon Musk have led to growing fear and anxiety among veterans and their families that they will not receive quality, timely, and private care. I urge you to work with President Trump to ensure that this chaos and confusion is remedied immediately.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirsten Gillibrand". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

⁴ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/02/25/more-layoffs-veterans-department/80303826007/>