



March 30, 2020

The Honorable Mark R. Warner  
United States Senate  
703 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Alternate Care Facilities

Dear Senator Warner:

On behalf of Virginia's hospitals and health systems, the more than 130,000 people they employ, and the many patients and communities they serve, thank you for your service and leadership during this unprecedented health care crisis. We sincerely appreciate your support for the third stimulus package, the CARES Act, which the President signed into law on Friday.

Access to health care for Virginians who need emergency services, whether related to COVID-19 or other medical challenges, is of the utmost importance to us. The Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA) works year-round to improve health care safety, quality, service, and access. This includes ongoing efforts with our hospital members, the state and federal governments, and other stakeholders to provide care each day to patients in need and to train for public health emergencies such as COVID-19.

Several weeks ago, our hospitals activated contingency plans to increase bed capacity. Those plans include utilization of existing assets located within the hospital footprint, as well as alternate care facilities (ACF) located close to the hospital.

In anticipation of even greater capacity needs, all VHHA members have postponed and rescheduled elective procedures in order to prepare for a surge in demand for hospital beds and to preserve scarce resources. Virginia's hospitals and health systems proactively took these steps prior to Governor Northam's directive on elective medical procedures scheduled at hospitals and other medical facilities. These actions enabled Virginia hospitals to significantly increase bed capacity and leverage existing resources should we need to expand capacity.

Currently, federal and state government officials are exploring potential ACF sites within the Commonwealth, including hotels and convention centers for the purposes of establishing temporary hospitals. Due to the nationwide shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing capacity, as well as a growing shortage of available skilled medical staff to treat the medical needs of patients suffering from COVID-19, it is uncertain what the ultimate success of this ACF initiative will be.

As you are notably proud, Virginia is home to one of the largest military footprints in the country. Virginia military bases have on-site acute care hospitals and clinics in many of the

communities where the projected impact of COVID-19 is expected to intensify. The same is also true for the acute care hospitals and clinics operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Given that both the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs have postponed or cancelled all non-emergency elective procedures and many clinical operations, we are aware that they currently have significant capacity in these facilities.

**Last week, the military released their afloat hospital surge capacity, the USNS *Mercy* and *Comfort*, for the COVID-19 response. We respectfully request that you urge the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to open their landside facilities for patient testing, admission, and care of COVID-19 patients** at the following facilities:

- Ft. Belvoir Community Hospital
- Naval Medical Center Portsmouth
- Kenner Army Health Clinic (Ft. Lee)
- McDonald Army Health Center (Ft. Eustis)
- Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center (Richmond)
- Hampton VA Medical Center
- Salem VA Medical Center

We estimate the total number of surge beds that could be made available by utilizing these resources to be in excess of 2,000 beds. These facilities are the ultimate ACF given their geographic location and availability as existing medical facilities already equipped, staffed, and supplied to provide admission and care of COVID-19 patients.

**We believe opening these facilities to all individuals would make a major impact on Virginia's medical surge capabilities amid this evolving pandemic. At a minimum, we request the ability to direct or transfer everyone on active military duty, in the National Guard or Reserves, retired military, Department of Defense contractors, and their dependents to these facilities.**

With the invocation of various war-related and defense authorities by the federal government, we believe this is a reasonable and prudent approach to enhance bed capacity which may be needed to meet the growing demand resulting from the COVID-19 crisis.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership during this difficult time.

Sincerely,



Sean T. Connaughton  
President & CEO

cc: The Honorable Ralph S. Northam